Sulfur 31

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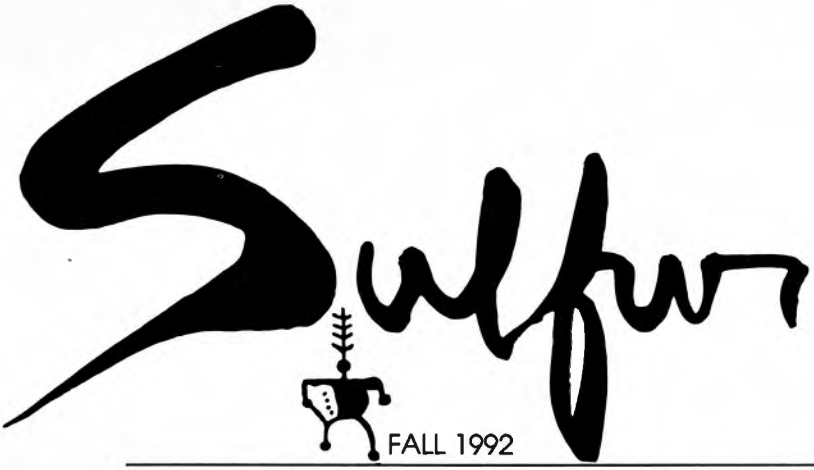

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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WALT WHITMAN
POEM OF THE PROPOSITIONS OF NAKEDNESS

Respondez! Respondez!
Let every one answer! Let all who sleep be awaked! Let none evade—not you, any more than others!
Let that which stood in front go behind! and let that which was behind advance to the front and speak!
Let murderers, thieves, tyrants, bigots, unclean persons, offer new propositions!
Let the old propositions be postponed!
Let faces and theories be turned inside out! Let meanings be criminal as well as results! (Say! can results be criminal, and meanings not criminal?)
Let there be no suggestion besides the suggestion of drudgery!
Let none be pointed toward his destination! (Say! do you know your destination?)
Let trillions of men and women be mocked with bodies and mocked with souls!
Let the love that waits in them, wait! Let it die, or pass still-born to other spheres!
Let the sympathy that waits in every man, wait! or let it also pass, a dwarf, to other spheres!
Let contradictions prevail! Let one thing contradict another! and let one line of my poem contradict another!
Let the people sprawl with yearning aimless hands! Let their tongues be broken! Let their eyes be discouraged! Let none descend into their hearts with the fresh lusciousness of love!
Let the theory of America be management, caste, comparison! (Say! what other theory would you?)
Let the crust of hell be neared and trod on! Let the days be darker than the nights! Let slumber bring less slumber than waking-time brings!

Let the world never appear to him or her for whom it was made!
Let the heart of the young man exile itself from the heart of the old man! and let the heart of the old man be exiled from that of the young man!
Let the sun and moon go! Let scenery take the applause of the audience! Let there be apathy under the stars!
Let freedom prove no man's inalienable right! Everyone who can tyrannize, let him tyrannize to his satisfaction!
Let none but infidels be countenanced!
Let the eminence of meanness, treachery, sarcasm, hate, greed, indecency, impotence, lust, be taken for granted above all! Let poems, judges, governments, households, religions, philosophers, take such for granted above all!
Let the worst men beget children out of the worst women!
Let priests still play at immortality!
Let death be inaugurated!
Let nothing remain upon earth except teachers, artists, moralists, lawyers, and learned and polite persons!
Let him who is without my poems be assassinated!
Let the cow, the horse, the camel, the garden-bee—Let the mud-fish, the lobsters, the mussel, eel, the sting-ray and the grunting pig-fish—Let these, and the like of these, be put on a perfect equality with man and woman!
Let churches accommodate serpents, vermin, and the corpses of those who have died of the most filthy of diseases!
Let marriage slip down among fools, and be for none but fools!
Let men among themselves talk obscenely of women! and let women among themselves talk obscenely of men!
Let every man doubt every woman! and let every woman trick every man!
Let us all, without missing one, be exposed in public, naked, monthly, at the peril of our lives! Let our bodies be freely handled and examined by whoever chooses!
Let nothing but love-songs, pictures, statues, elegant works, be permitted to exist upon the earth!
Let the earth desert God, nor let there ever henceforth be mentioned the name of God!
Let there be no God!

Let there be money, business, railroads, imports, exports, custom, authority, precedents, pallor, dyspepsia, smut, ignorance, unbelief!

Let judges and criminals be transposed! Let the prison-keepers be put in prison! Let those that were prisoners take the keys! (Say! why might they not just as well be transposed?)

Let the slaves be masters! Let the masters become slaves!

Let the reformers descend from the stands where they are forever bawling! Let an idiot or insane person appear on each of the stands!

Let the Asiatic, the African, the European, the American and the Australian, go armed against the murderous stealthiness of each other! Let them sleep armed! Let none believe in good-will!

Let there be no living wisdom! Let such be scorned and derided off from the earth!

Let a floating cloud in the sky—Let a wave of the sea—Let one glimpse of your eye-sight upon the landscape or grass—Let growing mint, spinach, onions, tomatoes—Let these be exhibited as shows at a great price for admission!

Let the men of These States stand aside for a few smouchers! Let the few seize on what they choose! Let the rest gawk, giggle, starve, obey!

Let shadows be furnished with genitals! Let substances be deprived of their genitals!

Let there be immense cities—but through any of them, not a single poet, saviour, knower, lover!

Let the infidels of These States laugh all faith away! If one man be found who has faith, let the rest set upon him! Let them affright faith! Let them destroy the power of breeding faith!

Let the she-harlots and the he-harlots be prudent! Let them dance on, while seeming lasts! (O seeming! seeming! seeming!)

Let the preachers recite creeds! Let the preachers of creeds never dare to go meditate upon the hills, alone, by day or night! (If one ever once dare, he is lost!)

Let insanity have charge of sanity!

Let books take the place of trees, animals, rivers, clouds!

Let the portraits of heroes supersede heroes!

Let the manhood of man never take steps after itself! Let it take steps after eunuchs, and after consumptive and genteel persons!

Let the white person tread the black person under his heel! (Say! which is trodden under heel, after all?)

Let the reflections of the things of the world be studied in mirrors! Let the things themselves continue unstudied!

Let a man seek pleasure everywhere except in himself! Let a woman seek happiness everywhere except in herself! (Say! what real happiness have you had one single time through your whole life?)

Let the limited years of life do nothing for the limitless years of death! (Say! what do you suppose death will do, then?)

[1856]

MILTON KESSLER
A NOTE ON WHITMAN

June, 1992: Reading *Poem of the Propositions of Nakedness,* by Walt Whitman, poem 30 in *Leaves of Grass,* 1856 edition, the poem later changed and named *Respondez.* First edition seen at Clark Library, UCLA.

:

The 1856 edition was parlor-sized with root-rich botanical lettering on 8" x 11½" cover. For the 1856, WW wanted extreme contraction of all elements to pocket book size, 3½" x 6", the lines and title break and fall as portable, democratic scale requires. (Camden Journal, Nov. 11, 1889): "I stick to my liking. I had it in my head in my earliest years—that to put a book in your pocket and off to the seashore or forest—that is the ideal pleasure." The 1856 had Emerson's language on spine and in appendix, Emerson's greeting to the 1855; the edition has a touch of New England Bible in scale as well. WW handled everything, nothing to be left alone as is. He remade the works, as God, daily-and-self-praised for daily.

:

"And God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.' Gen. 1:3. To whosoever the word *vayehi* (and there was) is applied, that thing is in this world and the world to come. / Rabbi Isaac said: 'At the Creation, God irradiated the world from end to end with light, but then it was withdrawn so as to deprive the sinners of the world of its enjoyment and it is stored away. . . .'" (Zohar).

:

Here is the Genesis reversal, the Situs Inversus, the biology of contraction into inversion, the parody of creation. *Poem of the Propositions of Nakedness* carries the commands of a creator defending the Word's power from the curdling, the souring of the unworthy. WW was about 34 when he made *Nakedness.* The work was made prior to the Depression of 1854, prior to the hopeless election of 1856 (though published in its year), prior to Slavery War, Reconstruction, *Democratic Vistas.* It is a prophetic signal, an improvisational spasm of mocking street cries, an enraged nightmare torture garden of unrequited or depersonalized love, "RESPONDEZ!" WW on *Nakedness,* "a cry in a dream I heard, with ironical taunting. . . .we may as well say it as think it." (Blue Book in Thomas.) The curdling of the

self-mocked democracy, the degradation of work and occupation, the approach of machine age, the failure into war, the failure of war, he prophesized it, less than thirty years after the death of Jefferson and almost a century before futurist-fascism. There are no sleepers walking hand in hand here. There is no rest. The work makes me think of *Wozzeck*, and it suggests we read *Leaves of Grass* as 40-year *Exodus*.

:

Of the 166 tollings of the word "let" in *Leaves of Grass*, 90 are in *Poem on the Propositions* (Pro/positions) *of Nakedness*, 90 spasms to form the shape of the wrestling. Of the 22 usings of the word "respond" in all forms in L.o.G., the relation to mating is overwhelmingly omnipresent. *Nakedness* cries out its pulsing possessiveness. (Cradle) "I heard my mate responding to me," (Vigil) "responding kisses." The original title (1856) signaled the humiliating, blocked erotic jag and jazz that pistons the poem.

:

Almost 40 years later (Camden Journal, Aug. 8th, 1889): "I (Traubel) spoke of Camden as 'extending rapidly and becoming a big town,' to which he (WW) quietly said, 'Yes—an ever larger and larger congregation of maggots, human maggots. . . . It seems to me there never was a time in the history of the world when the underflowing currents of life—the beating pulse of social idealism, was so low, so vile, so dirty, so mean. Never, never! Certainly in our social life all is villainy and dollars and cents—it is rotten to the core.'"

WILL ALEXANDER
LOS ANGELES: THE EXPLOSIVE CIMMERIAN FISH

> The American hour. Violence, excess, waste, mercantilism, bluff, gregariousness stupidity, vulgarity, disorder.
>
> —Aimé Césaire,
> *Discourse On Colonialism*

The planetary air now burns with transition, the Russian Bear is missing, the American Eagle, faulty, coughing up blood, after each of its foreign invasions. I'm speaking here of a tide washing the Western mental ethos bit by bit into an unremitting void, and the tide is dark, tropical, a-linear, African.

Because we exist in an era of intensive time acceleration, decades have been compressed into years, and years into months, and months into days. One can witness in present humanity a force analogous to geological surgeries taking place without let up. Not over 20 days after the Los Angeles ozone was blackened, the energy infuses Bangkok, then the resignations of Daryl Gates, and prime Minister Suchinda transpire, symbolically and concretely representing the end of the corrupted plesiosaur's advantage. To paraphrase Césaire, leaders can no longer voluptuously wallow in "cliches," self-consumed in dispensable rhetorics. There is no time left for camouflage, for testimonials beclouded in deception. No, there is an inevitability at hand, a nervous taking of stock, as the "Southern" cone seeks to shake itself free of the "Northern" cone's monological reign over the dialectics of terrestrial existence. Shaking free of its deadly cuisines, its wholesale marketing of innocent blood for monetary gain and prestige.

Los Angeles, an explosive Cimmerian fish, has engendered insurgent anomalous fumes, as though spawned from fires in darkened Devonian waters. Fumes, more akin to lightning with its tense peripheral spillage, rising and ironically lighting those magnetic Goyaesque perils, those frontiers of stored up interior wrath, where destiny is focused by a seemingly mercurial vengeance, exploding the system of Imperial nerve

vents. And these nerve vents have always mechanically palpitated at the whim of a racist, plutonic aristocracy.

And the authorities of the land now clearly seen in the light of a ruthless psychic impoverishment, paralyzed in the agonising throes of statistical explanation and panic.

Conversely, each of the dispossessed suddenly startled by the spontaneous current of articulate aphasia, have responded like the rapid heartbeat of an eagle silently salivating before tearing the flesh from its prey, the dispossessed suddenly slashing through the barbarian stereotypes so rampantly re-inforced by the media as a given. The oppressed, the outraged, without warning, standing like magical lightning bolts, like boiling arithmetical titans, their uncanny stumbling quickly focused and sinister, guided by the force of exponential resurrection.

This latter defiance seems at the root of the Los Angeles insurrection. I viewed the post trial interview with Laurence Powell in a Bible shop at Manchester and Vermont hours before it burned into cinders. And an older Black gentleman, scriptures in hand, came up to me as I watched the officers' smug jubilation, and emotionally called for a balancing act by blood. I then stepped from the store into the street and immediately noticed that the people were galvanic with telepathy. And they understood their resurrection as coming from the passionate concentration of flame.

The King decision, like a reddish flair brutishly thrust in a wound, brought the colonial atmosphere to a pitch, and caused us as Blacks to vent a necessitous gangrene, bringing us in contact with the temperature of Indian animosity when forced to ingest the initial volleys of European acquisition and greed. This American enclave, initially garnered, remains acquitted by the surgical implementation of homicide, in the main reserved for peoples of colour, who collectively wake every dawn to intolerable rays of imposed barbarity and fatigue, with insults constantly branded upon grafts of our sub-conscious skin.

Having spent my earlier and later youth in the zones of both Los Angeles rebellions, I've come to understand the basic currency of anguish passed back and forth between the drowned and the drowned, whose reality fails to register upon the moguls of the daily "Wall Street" "Exchange Indexes." And to what Dan Quayle refers to as the "average American," we Blacks are no more than annoying poltergeists. We remain to the majority, occult, raging, maniacal, not to be trusted, looked upon as a criminal detour in genetic evolvement. So, to effect methodic insertion into this less and less viable mainstream, as persons of colour, we must cover our core with a hideous salt so as to mime a Euro-American competence, in keeping with a behavioral duplicity and numbing, and by straining towards such a position, we are verbally forced to eschew the surreptitious evil which institutionally lurks in the cells of the body politic.

In contrast, I think of the "100,000,000" slaves murdered amidst the slime of the "Middle Passage," animated by "moans," and "fever," and "dying." Then there exists the sulfurous galaxy of continuing Indian murder and displacement, and here you have a national ambiance shaped at its core by insidious disharmony and greed. It is like an ocean of scars washing onto a shore of surcease and psycho-physical incarceration.

America, an incessant nitro-glycerine story, where the sun has been historically stored to energize the crops of the ambassadorial slavers, initially grown and watered by the blood of free labour. But during the revolt, a Rubicon has been crossed, and we have witnessed the telepathic artistry of revenge, the molecules of rebellion, which, because of optimum social deterioration, have exploded into a metamorphosis of nightmares, where wicker stick thrones have blown up and vanished.

The daily paper registers decline, as though witnessing the throes of the Roman population watching the year tragically darken, and turn into the continuing constriction of A.D. 455. All attempts at revival are no more than the impregnation and birth by a mother whose belly has been asphyxiated by stone. We Blacks are the barbarians sweeping into Rome from Asia and Gaul. Because of our insidious numbers we are inflicting genetic punishment upon the majority population. And here I speak not from emotion, but from a sense of inevitability. The masses, before another century closes will be composed of Egyptian yellow-brown. The key here is that the current majority cannot finance or murder its way out of the circumstances of a shrinking genetic base. As I see it, a quite palpable karmic backlash.

So I ask, where is the Belgian Congo, or German East Africa, or the Italian domination of Libya? Vanished, mesmerized by their continuing invalidation and disappearance. And so we turn to Herr Hitler with his thousand year boast, and Mussolini, and the anti-semitic Stalin, astrally shaking in their grave boots, assaulted by the billion hallucinations of organic infinity. In keeping with these triune annihilations, there has been a contagious erosion of each Imperial attempt at colonial hegemony, the most accessible examples being the ferocious Algerian independence, and the double cyanide of Viet-Nam to both the Americans and the French.

As for me, I've returned to the fevers of Moroccan trance intensity, to the aleatoric meters of the distant shaman's bell, calling me like a bird to the supreme longevity of the bluish outer stars shining in super-luminal immensity, "where communication is established with the higher states of being." A communication so essential to my genetic lineage in the darker southern climes, where the rituals burn, where morality is electric. More simply put, I am seeking return to this original psychic reflex, with its mandibles charged by the alchemy of poetic smoke and catharsis.

Such communion is an energy, which, by its very motion, desecrates the hobbled western legal codes, which have always deformed the rights of the collective darker races, which have tragically acquitted those who have bludgeoned in the name of racial subjugation, which have raised to levels of honor, murderers, oily capitalizers, those who have horrifically infected the general health of the darker peoples with thumbnail germs scattered across the pages of their fetid legal amalgams. A legacy of "cruelty," "mendacity," and "baseness." A legacy which has "no qualms about corpses."

Therefore, I align myself with the energies inherent in the wild specificity of Brazilian lianas, with the natural ambulations of tarantulas and Caimans, with the nomos of carnivorous Amazonian greenery, with its fire-ants stored in "Cecropia" trees, with its restless Jaguars and lizards, with its monstrous "Acrosoma" spiders. Here I am gliding down jagged rapids of sound, clothed with "decorative" "peperomia" leaves seismically watching the sub-conscious weathers of my brethren, as a former slave society, striking back at degradation, with the anger and force of a partially-mutilated piranha.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
HARDBALL

I see the raped and beaten black body
I say I see the raped and beaten black body
I say I a white man see the raped and beaten black body,
for the next 39 lines you will hear Rodney beaten,
for they swingled him, they
buttfucked his eyes, they crosslabored him,
they kicked mocked and backed him, backed
him good, they sought to south him, to speedball
him north, then they toed his cream, they stepped
balled him, they whitemen outvoted his groin,
then they went for his teeth, he tried to scream they mouthstick
fucked him, they kickass arabed him—did they Baghdad him?
Did they 170,000 Iraqi children him?

Did they sewage water system him?

Did they Kurd & carpet bomb his retreat?

And in case you think I am mixing oil with macadam,
they beat Rodney King as if he were wood
or cockroach, less rock than cock,
they beat him because he was black nearly dead man,
cause he was nigger,
now all you white students repeat with me
you who never will you who have no moral will did
they beat him as your father might have beat your mother?
Because women and blacks are the beatabilities,

kill this black white woman because heshe is,

kill this living black white pink and blue trunk,

kill this human trunk that bulges and weeps.
Beat what I am. Beat what you are.
Beat and beat, as if no masturbation were strong enough,
to rip out the white, to push it up, calcite, huge
  chalk tunnels of your come in you,
to so dispossess us of the human that we must regard
  our birth channel
forever in challenge with us? Aie, we are, in birth,
and we are beating our birth, we are, in birth,
and we are whipping ourselves, in birth,
beat Rodney beat the earth
and know now beat the earth is no longer
  dance step or game title
but swerve to piles in the watchers' eyes
while the dead pile up under,
    the dead, the beavers and
  all those fleas we never wanted to name.

[from *Under World Arrest*]

JED RASULA

PACIFIC RIM SHOTS: SPACE AND RACE IN LOS ANGELES

I lived in Los Angeles from 1976 to 1990. In early May many familiar sites were turned to rubble in a conflagration that seemed to do little more than tickle the media's fancy. I caught some glimpses on the tube: a scorched liquor store a few doors down from my favorite Thai restaurant, to which I was introduced at a dinner with Maxine Hong Kingston in 1977; and a torched mini-mall next to my daughter's elementary school (mini-malls were the urban chiggers that symptomatically attached themselves to every vacant street corner in the metropolitan area during the 1980s). Now that I no longer live there, it seemed for the first time a bit estranging to see it on T.V. Living in Southern California was always like living inside a screen or monitor anyway, cars everywhere like pixels. It deranges your sense of scale, but Los Angeles is a city in which the estrangement is necessary to the addiction; to live there is, in part, to dwell inside a catastrophe, and to feed off of an enchanting cumulus of dread.

L. A. multiculturalism has become a media commonplace since the advent of "the Pacific Rim." But the polyethnic fibers of the city go all the way back. It was always hard for outsiders to get the sense, so easily sustained for me living in Echo Park,[1] of a potent multicultural matrix as the sustaining prospect of any foreseeable and agreeable future. That seemed to me the only reason to live there, to perch on the rim of that portent, to feel something futuristic that wasn't all plastic and fuel, but was stubbornly, if regressively, human. It scarcely seems, given its name, that the city of angels could have a human dimension: the problem is to recognize it in its decidedly incalculable manifestations. The most fleeting of all human dimensions in L. A. turns out to be its history, characteristically endowed with folkloric status by Hollywood versions which brew up facts into the charismatic aurora borealis of celluloid. A potent chronicle, decade by decade since the 1940s, might consist of *Double Indemnity, Kiss Me Deadly, Point Blank, Chinatown, Blade Runner,* and for the infant '90s possibly Altman's recent *The Player.* It's a singular tribute to hail as the best book yet written on Los Angeles a portrait that makes only fleeting references to Hollywood and none at all to Disneyland, Mike Davis's vibrant sculptoramic history, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los*

Angeles (Vintage paperback, Verso Cloth), a book that inspires all the old cliches from the era of pulp literacy (packs a punch. . .a real page-turner, etc.). We're living through a revisionist period of "people's history," but Davis is one of the few who knows that the big shots are people too (they're just people who have the means to get their stories told first, loudest, boldest and like Charles Foster Kane, never shrink even under the uncompromising glare of "revelations").

Kevin Starr, the booster historian, has called Los Angeles "the Great Gatsby of American cities" without perhaps realizing the implications. Gatsby, after all, despite all his riches, lives beyond the ecology of his emotional means, and dies at the side of his pool, shot point blank. Gatsby's credulous nature is also pertinent to L. A. sensibility: when Nick protests that you can't turn back the clock Gatsby replies, with no trace of irony, "Why of course you can!" Gatsby hails from Midwestern stock of the kind that flocked to Southern California in the first two decades of the 20th century, in pursuit of a "futuropolis" for the master race. City of Quartz is especially valuable for its documentation of racism as a controlling theme throughout the region's history. The allure of Southland Shangri La has extended to every ethnic group on earth, but only whites came with the arrogance to assume it as a destiny, an unparalleled historical opportunity: in a telling phrase of Irving Gill in 1916 "it is the newest white page turn for registration"[2]—registration, presumably, in the grand genetic hotel, where the isolate desert locale was supposed to be an ideal incubator for Aryan regeneration. In other words, Fantasyland descended on Southern California before Mickey Mouse was even a gleam in Disney's eye. The openly racist priorities of such organizations as the Anti-African Housing Association in the 1920s have been perpetuated under the more benign guise of neighborhood "protective associations." In Los Angeles, where "community" may signify nothing more than the common bond of bigotry, property values are a species of demonology. A legacy of the high cost of white insularity is a combination of arrogance and paranoia. If paranoia manifests itself in the trappings of bunker mentality that festoon windows and doors, the arrogance is most apparent in matters of style (and style, as Davis points out, is itself a form of "street violence" [315]).

I recall a vivid portent of L. A. styles to come at two concerts I attended the same week in 1978, on opposite sides of Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood: the skinhead and punk throng turned out for The Clash, and the *nouveau cool* at a Talking Heads gig, who at that point had not yet been anointed yuppies. Los Angeles and postmodernism converged in the 1980s as the newfound multiculturalism of the Pacific Rim was celebrated in the Olympiad and in Peter Sellars' gala Festival of the Arts, blatantly packaged to pluralize the tastes of young stylemongers. "L. A. style" entered the postmodern equation as a kind of mental spritzer. The emergent sensibility

had a lot going for it by leaving even more behind, as lucrative deals were struck, injecting the arts directly into the fundstream of the metropole. "At its worst," Davis notes, "'corporate multiculturalism' is an attitude that patronizes imported diversity while ignoring its own backyard." (81) Black Angelenos were crudely informed that they weren't being left out of the festival, but were represented by genuine Africans. The sleek appeal of arts polyethnicity was achieved at the expense of a ravaged inner city, in "a conjuncture of arts bonanza and scorched earth." (80) The revitalization of downtown L. A., along with renovation of Melrose Avenue as a four mile neon corridor, and the gentrification of pocket communities throughout the basin, represent utopianism as the blight of sensibility. The legacy of (sub)urban sprawl, abetted by miraculous overnight style centers, instituted racism as an ethical prophylactic, so white happy campers never need to form or articulate opinions that might get them in trouble.

As the glass and marble towers retraced a series of new skylines during the 1980s, the surrounding streets struck a gusher of indigents. The equation was shockingly obvious: the cost of aesthetic style is human degradation. That sounds simplistic, but L. A.'s simplicities turn out to have supervened over the more layered historical complexities that govern the rest of the country. We need to imagine the $35.2 million Getty Pontormo as one end of the umbilicus that leads to a shopping cart on Skid Row. The number of street people in L. A. is approximately that of the entire population of Tucson or Nashville, yet according to Davis the only public restroom on Skid Row has been removed as a "policy decision." (233) Public water facilities are unavailable, and anyway recent ordinances prohibit public washing above the elbows. Water is strategically administered to the homeless by way of sprinkler systems designed to activate erratically and thus deter them from sleeping in the parks. Sleeping outdoors isn't forbidden, but erecting shelters (i.e. "cardboard condos") is against the law, and despite the myth of balmy California people do freeze to death in the winter. Pricey cities like Beverly Hills and San Marino close their public parks on weekends, not only to exclude the homeless, but the working class ethnic rabble. Other municipalities have instituted user fees, not openly as a tactic of class stratification, but ostensibly to offset declining budgets (in 1987, for instance, the city allocated only $30,000 for playground recreation facilities citywide). The municipal justification is invariably property value, which in L. A. has traditionally been a function of speculative monopolies. During my tenure in L. A. there were years when the equity in my house exceeded my annual earning—making me a beneficiary of a windfall I never expected, in a housing market fueled by frenzied investors hellbent on generating such private windfalls at any social cost.

The greater Los Angeles area accommodates numerous instances of incommensurable values and means, side by side. The apparent uniformity

that greets the tourist from the freeway overpasses is dispelled on the surface streets (if you run your odometer up, that is). The conventional view is that the staggering rollcall of independent cities and hamlets is a result of proliferating growth that has simply merged into the density of L. A. Mike Davis paints another picture, in which the suburban sprawl is invariably the result of white flight from the legions of demonized others. The suburbs, once settled, become seedbeds for slow (or no) growth initiatives, with the result that inner city zones are pressured to absorb the sort of unplanned ad hoc growth (in tenement apartments, mini-malls, etc.) that quiet residential neighborhoods shun. Slow growth is an ecological, financial, and human necessity in megalopolis, but it's important to recognize that in L. A. it also amounts to "a reassertion of social privilege." (213) Those who inhabit their tract shangrilas don't want to be overcrowded, but neither are they willing to suffer the taxation necessary to accommodate, and educate, a burgeoning population of immigrants and the traditional resident underclass. The pressures of conflicting claims are proving more than the metropolis can bear, as L. A. settles into its dual role as "imperium and colony" (105) in a Pacific Rim partnership, with Tokyo leading the way. It's no surprise, then, to find L. A. ablaze in the summer of '92. After all, what does it say about a polis in which community service is neither an inherited obligation nor a self-evident responsibility, but a form of punishment for white collar criminals?

In light of all this, I think Davis is justified in referring to an "urban cold war" (232) of the haves versus the have nots, particularly the "recreational apartheid" on which affluent communities rely. (308) It's a contest resulting conspicuously in a "juvenation of poverty," (306) in which social and material dispossession is directly proportionate to the age and race of the victims. The school system, for instance, has buckled under white flight following mandated integration in the 1970s. Spending per capita has plummeted, leaving the nation's largest school district one of the most impoverished. The dropout rate is as high as 40 percent, as lucrative entrepreneurial careers dealing crack beckon outside the gates. When crack flooded the streets in the mid-1980s the cash surplus in the region's Federal Reserve system was $3.8 billion, or a 2,300 percent increase of residual funds. (312) Chalk marks on a blackboard just don't add up anymore.

Davis provides an invaluable sociology of gangs in south central L. A. After the demise of the Black Panthers, gangs began appearing in schools in the early 1970s as a less focused, more parochial variant of ethnic pride. For two decades now evidence has overwhelmingly indicated a corollary between gang membership and the lack of jobs. Davis goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the colonization of labor by offshore capital has created a balloon of wealth around the Southland, leaving Watts a decapitalized

vacuum. From 1972 to 1982 unemployment in the black community rose 50 percent, and purchasing power fell by a third. (305) The numerous growth centers of Southern California's boom economy have, astoundingly, less than one percent black population. In Los Angeles since 1974 two-thirds of all black male youths have been arrested in what amounts to a racist program of harassment, and the corresponding criminalization of an entire community. The language of public alarm increasingly veers toward exterminist rhetoric.

Given its domination by the automobile, it's not surprising that the L. A. formula for lawlessness—whether applied by race or by class— is to be on the streets. The LAPD's favored maintenance procedure is the street sweep (which, as Davis points out, can result in an arrest ratio in which charges are never filed against 90 percent of those taken into custody). Curfews, roadblocks, checkpoints, and pass law requirements have been repeatedly introduced into ethnic communities, where the implicit formula is that colored adolescents are juvenile criminals justifying militarized intervention and surveillance (white communities never warrant such measures, because white adolescents are merely "delinquents" [295]). Recent events in the wake of the Rodney King verdict have made it clear, as it was in 1965, that we would do well to consider the power of vocabulary to introduce or else obscure crucial distinctions. A "riot" as reported to white America on T.V. may be felt by participants as something of a rebellion. On the other hand, the infamous Jarvis amendment, Prop 13, was routinely touted as a tax rebellion. And it was indeed a rebellious demand for an equalization of already exceptional privileges among property owners. But whenever the unpropertied masses take to the streets the nomenclature turns to riot, and the participants are miscreants, not citizens.

The May conflagration, for anyone really tuned in to the city rather than the image, was a reminder that Los Angeles is an occupied zone the merits comparison with Belfast, if not yet Beirut. The most conspicuous feature of this, like any cold war, is military "preparedness." Since its innovative adoption of radio in patrol cars in the 1920s, the LAPD has been at the forefront of technosurveillance. Rooftops throughout the city are painted with huge numbers, converting urban space into a virtual police grid. Police 'copters are omnipresent, and I imagine it must be spooky for Vietnam vets to be periodically visited by hovercraft roar—that audible trace of the "Jehovan scrutiny of the LAPD's space program." (253) The LAPD won approval by the Police Commission in 1988 to use "dum-dum" bullets, hollow-point ammunition banned in warfare by the Geneva Convention. (290) Davis usefully chronicles a separation of policing duties into public and private sectors. While the LAPD has increasingly specialized in assault teams and other paramilitary operations, the more humdrum

aspects of policework have been privatized in the rapid growth industry of "guarded communities" servicing fortress mentality. In a bizarre but related decorative twist, lawns in L. A. are dotted with two-foot signs warning of "armed response" where formerly they were graced by those icons of gentility, blackface grooms. The demeanor of conspicuous consumption has gone from open celebration of privilege to menacing defense of luxury life-styles. What's unique about L. A. is that even the pillbox fleatraps are "protected" by iron bars over every aperture to the outer world. In a highly ironic turnabout, it's the class of the dispossessed, those with criminal records and a trail of social misalignments, lining up to fill the low wage roles of private defenders.

Desperate as this sounds, it's only the human side of a catastrophe in waiting that has even more scintillating perils to offer. These are the infrastructural components of the debacle: The Los Angeles basin is the most polluted region in the industrialized first world, and, failing to comply with the 1970 Clean Air Act, the city faces withdrawal of Federal subsidies on a staggering scale. Water supply is imperiled by years of drought; but rains are disastrous when they come, because it's a desert climate not geologically fit to sustain the anti-regional styles of building and planting prevalent there. Furthermore, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers has noted that the existing storm drains can't tolerate the run-off generated by all the new road surfaces and rooftops that are the mark of L. A.'s boom economy. Then there's the matter of sewage: in 1987 the Hyperion Treatment Plant, that "Grand Coulee of sewage plants" (198), broke down, and Angelenos had to face the awkward fact that processing capacity of existing facilities was exhausted and there weren't even any plans to expand the system. L. A. will be floating in shit for the estimated thirty years and up to $40 billion required to get a clean flush again. Natural disasters like earthquakes and the annually devastating brush fires seem relatively containable by comparison: but there's a hitch there too, because these menaces to life and property can't be met without emergency vehicle access. And as everybody knows, Los Angeles is close to total gridlock; in fact, simply to sustain the current level of congestion through the end of the decade it's estimated to cost $110 billion—otherwise the average freeway speeds will be 15 m.p.h. (Actually they already are 15 m.p.h. much of the day; late night acceleration, presumably, is factored in to produce higher averages; looked at another way, though, the anticipated 15 m.p.h. average for 1999 means that daytime velocities may be closer to about 3 m.p.h.!) All of this comes to a monumental municipal price tag, and I haven't even mentioned solid waste disposal costs, or the nearly half-billion annual operating budget for the LAPD. Or the cost of schools and other public services, all of which are at the mercy of a legacy of taxpayer revolt.

L. A.'s problems of self-management may seem comparable to that of any other big city; the difference is that Los Angeles is a city of the psyche.

It's a commonplace that Tinseltown is a figure of our collective imaginations. But we're only slowly coming round to seeing that the mind L. A. impinges on is the unconscious, the libidinal space of nightmare monstrosity and enigma. Los Angeles, Cain observed in *Mildred Pierce*, "has forgotten more than all other civilizations ever knew." This has been obscured by the region's manifest openness to the gaze. Spread out as far as the eye can see to every horizon, L. A. is a city caught up in the logic of escape, predicated by its horizontality. The lateral oscillations of populations derives psychic coordinates from a mythos of the old west: if you don't get along with your neighbors, seek out new territory to get that bad taste of contact out of your mind. The contact or confrontation purged by relocation has its own migration to pursue. So when things *go down*, and the really bad shit hits the proverbial fan, the depth is seismic. (Maybe the omnipresent threat of seismic shock compensates geologically for L. A.'s notorious lack of "depth.") The vertical highs and lows that typify the Freudian psychodrama don't appear on Southland horizons (in New York, by contrast, all those skyscrapers can't help but suggest an immense hydraulic activity, converting up into down at the push of an elevator button). The trick is to recognize, in the flatland punctuated by ruffles of arroyo and collapsing hills, that a different libidinal energy prevails.

Davis refers to the "juvenation of poverty," but there are other sorts of juvenility as well, that facilitate our inspection of the funhouse mirror L. A. presents us with. "The psychohistory that documents the intellectual migrations to the most modern of frontiers cannot but unfold or fold out a psychology of the ultimate idol of Freud's second system: the adolescent or Californian."[3] The ceaseless zigzag of cars is an exemplary adolescent *modus operandi*. Also characteristic of adolescence is a sociability driven by anxieties of personal inadequacy. The laconic, "laid back" L. A. demeanor compensates for a bottled-up gregariousness. It's something Pynchon noticed in *The Crying of Lot 49*, with Oedipa Maas' paranoiac voyeurism. The scopic mendacity of the region afflicted the entire nation with the incendiary video of the Rodney King beating. The cannibal intensity of consumer voyeurism was irresistibly drawn to this episode, which was literally violence porn. Video is a medium deeply implicated in the "security" business. Surveillance and control are based on video images, and the King beating on video occupied a dual site of control (the cops) and loss of control (the bludgeoning). The video harbored another shock, which was only borne out in the courtroom, and that is the fact that video images are simply images, and can be manipulated like cardboard cutouts. That jurors could be convinced the beating wasn't real—or, more precisely, that King himself constituted a threat that couldn't be "captured" on video—is what gives it formal resonance as porn: that is, an image is simulation, and in the Platonic chamber of iconic reverberations we all

inhabit, the deepest fear and emblem of kinkiest desire is the wish for the "thing itself" to be revealed as a simulation as well. The King video, the King verdict, and the ensuing glut of yet more video havoc porn of the riots, all testify to the precariousness with which the unconscious, that fabled European museum of the deep, has been fabricated in America as the whimsical adolescent fantasia Freud feared and Disney celebrated. The historical dimension disclosed by recent events adds one more twist: in a space where depth is spread out, not up or down, the unconscious is depersonalized, becoming the only kind of community property not subject to zoning laws, building inspectors, or escrow. A generalized civic unconscious, however, isn't a rose parade. To a lot of people, living in L. A. is like living in somebody else's mind, subject to the depredations of the Monster Id like the critter in *Forbidden Planet.* And even it it's a matter not of libido but consciousness, living in somebody else's utopia can be like living nowhere at all.

NOTES

1 Echo Park is a largely Hispanic enclave (periodically doused with malathion from military 'copters to eradicate varieties of fruit flies just as common in white and thus unsprayed neighborhoods elsewhere in the basin) sandwiched between Chinatown, Dodger Stadium, and upscale Silver Lake and Los Feliz. It's in the hills overlooking downtown, the hills infamously known for the Hillside Strangler of the late 1970s.

2 The quote is from "Explaining Los Angeles," Michael Sorkin's exemplary meditation recently collected in his book *Exquisite Corpse* (Verso, 1991).

3 Laurence Rickels, *The Case of California* (Johns Hopkins U. P., 1991), p. 11. Rickels reads California through the hysterical lens of its uncanny double, Germany. As he points out, "The desire to render California a semiotic placeholder for a vast and complex network of contemporary phenomena is not a new one; the Frankfurt School made California an essential supplement to it spookulations." (6) One reads the secret ravings—cunningly choreographed by Rickels—of California's Germans (Adorno, Brecht, Mann, Schoenberg, etc.) with the same piqued interest as hagiographies on the Loch Ness Monster, UFO sightings, or glimpses of the Yetty, enthralling relics of an evolutionary terminus. The value of Rickels' book is his elaboration of the fact that California is a place everyone already knows. How?—through the unconscious, which is precisely the way the exiles recognized it as the solarized image of a Nazi Emerald City.

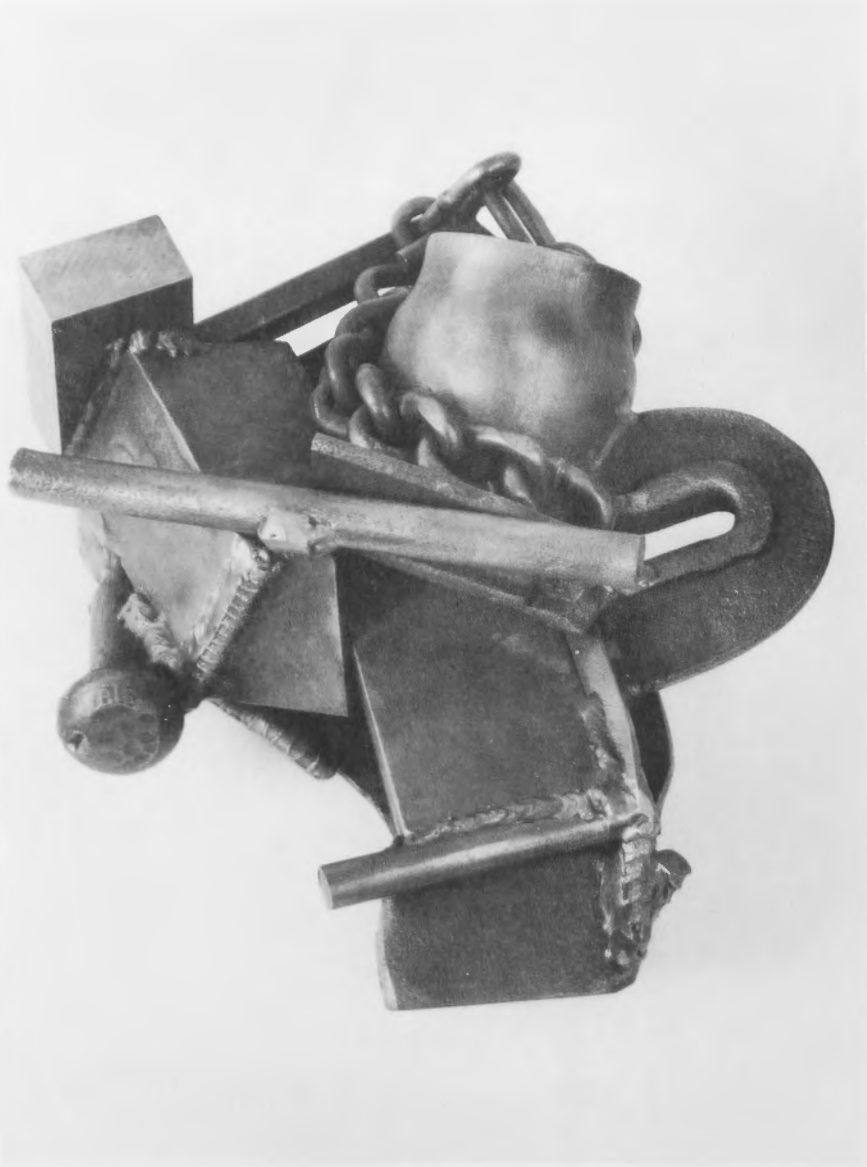
MELVIN EDWARDS
SIX *LYNCH FRAGMENTS*

REDEMPTION

Welded Steel, 10 x 14 x 8 Inches, 1990

PREMONITION

18 x 11 x 11 inches,
1990



GOOD WORD FROM CAYENNE

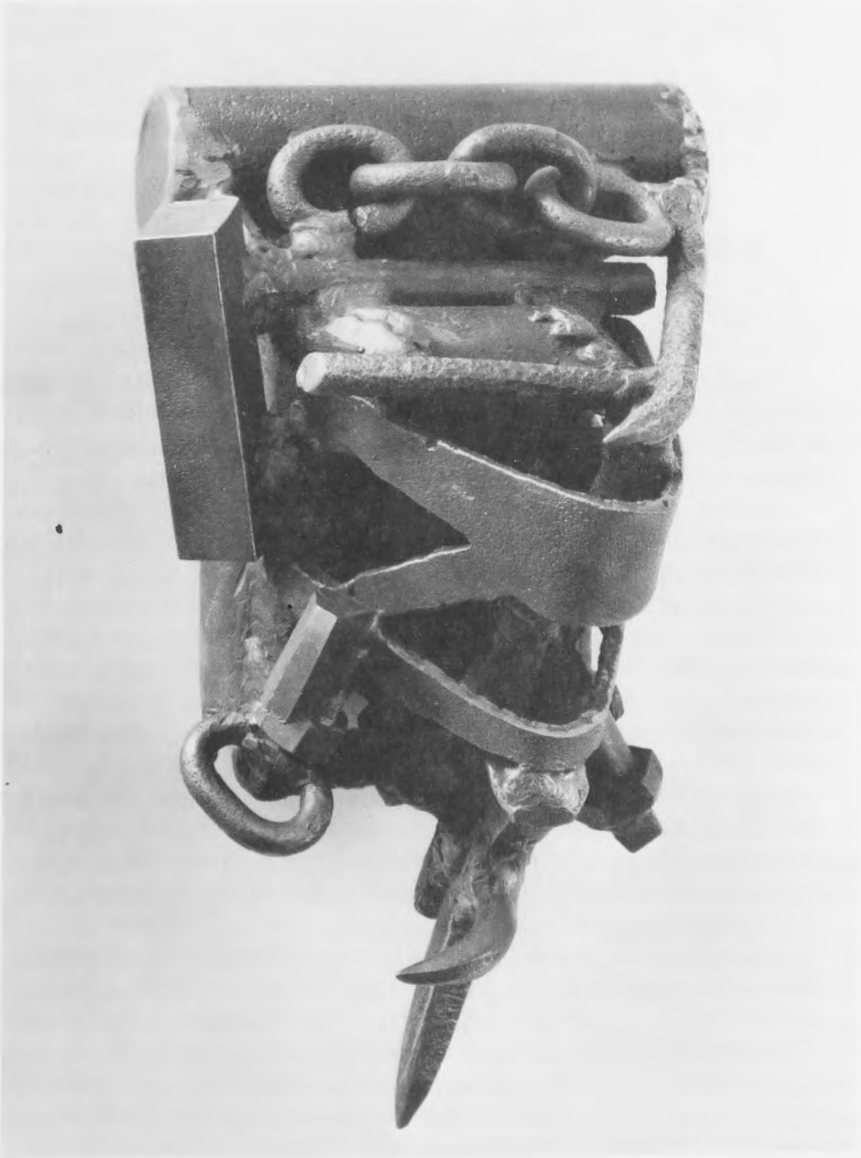
13 x 11 x 7 inches,
1990

SOUTHERN SEASON

12.5 x 10.5 x 9 Inches,
1990

DOUBLE GONG

10.5 x 7 x 10.5 inches,
1989



PALMARES

12 x 8 x 6 Inches,
1988

MEL EDWARDS
LYNCH FRAGMENTS

A lynching is a murder, a group murder. You take all of the energy of a lynching, all the hate and all the fear, and pile it on one human being. You tie that person to a tree and slowly or fastly kill him. The Lynch Fragment series is a series of sculpture ideas. What I'm doing is taking fragments of the intensity of a lynching, turning it around, changing it into an object, and making that object something creative and positive. So the thing itself is not to look like it's been lynched, but to have that scale of intensity, and that kind of power.

I have developed suspended environmental works made of barbwire and of chains. I also make larger pieces, public sculpture meant to have a relationship with architecture and the general public. You can say that the Lynch Fragments are a private conversation. A one on one situation. The public works are meant to affect masses of people at once. The material used for the Lynch Fragments is steel. Sometimes a piece of brass or bronze or chrome is added but for the most part they are welded steel. Each Lynch Fragment is different from the other and each has an individual title. In that respect they are like traditional African sculpture. The idea of a lynching was bad luck, or bad fate, or a bad situation for African-American people in the United States. But the Lynch Fragment, the sculpture, is really a positive work. They are powerful and they are ours, and they are mine, and they are not made by our oppressor. They are made by us as a continuance of the resistance against the oppression.

I started making them in 1963 during the period when the civil rights movement was in full force. It was my first experience with collective resistance. At that time I was teaching myself how to make sculpture and trying to find my own unique way of working. The Lynch Fragments come from family stories about lynchings. They come from my experiences of growing up in Houston, Texas, the black community in the fifth ward, the five years I lived in Dayton, Ohio, in the all-black Desoto-Bass housing project, and in the black neighborhoods in Los Angeles, California.

If you go by individual titles, that should tell you what the specific pieces are about. "Some Bright Morning" is a piece dedicated to a black family in Florida who had been warned by white people not to be so

militant. The family continued to be militant until the white people said that some bright morning they were coming to get them, and when they came, the black people were armed and ready. They fought and then took to the swamp in guerrilla warfare against those whites and they didn't lose.

The fragment dedicated to Soweto is dedicated to the continental African struggle against colonialism and oppression. What I learned from making the pieces was that under the "title" of oppression, we could do everything. In other words it's not the actual oppression that allows us to everything, but since we're really stronger than that oppression, we do everything anyway.

The actual forms produced within the pieces have a lot of variety and they fill me with many ideas for other kinds of pieces. The other pieces may not have the same look. The best way to view the Lynch Fragments is the way I intended, specifically in a ritual situation. This is the visual aspect of ritual. You take a limited amount of space, a square room, with nothing else in it but the Lynch Fragments. The room is maybe sixteen feet square and every two feet along the wall about eye level is a Lynch Fragment. I will guarantee anybody that they will have a strong feeling regardless of their interpretations.

The works have no intention whatsoever of being masks. I'm interested in human physical intensity and humans tend to read that at the level of the head for some reason. The head is the most expressive part of the human anatomy because it contains so many of the centers of the senses. The other thing that tends to make people think of masks is that the fragments are about the size of the human head. I place them on the wall at my eye level so it's about the same place that you run into a human head.

As a sculptor you spend time inventing something new. Your own language. So the language of the sculpture is not something that the uninitiated can walk up to and say I know what that is. You spend time trying to make things that people haven't put together before. I'm not inventing a sixteen-letter alphabet. I'm not making mathematics. I'm making something that's more open and more creative than that. Or, if it is mathematics, it's at the level of creative mathematics so it can be anything that I want it to be.

It's like logic, it starts with the subjective and I'm in charge of the subject. For example a railroad spike. To some people spikes are threatening. A railroad spike's job is to hold a rail onto a railroad cross-tie. Well if you're a Christian and you think of Christian symbolism and the nails in the feet of Christ as the epitome of symbolism for spikes, you may be going the wrong direction from where I'm thinking and doing. Not that they didn't nail somebody to a tree, but I don't give spikes a single meaning. I take it and change it or I may leave the material with its look of spikeness,

or I may change it so much, nobody would ever know it was a spike. I may use four spikes to make a diamond shape and what is important to me will not be the spike, but the diamond shape. So it varies. It's like putting words together.

The Lynch Fragments are on the feeling side of art more than on the intellectual side. I don't mean that they're not intelligent because I happen to think that they're very intelligent. They have the kind of power which is physical. They're not the art of the professor. They're the art of the worker in the physical sense. They're the art of the process where they get hammered: they get cut, parts of them have been machined and they get machined by me in a different way. You can see that these works have the look of having been through something in order to be what they are and in that way they're ritualistic.

I intended for the Lynch Fragments to remind black people of what we have come out of. That's important because in the United States we're the only people to actually come out of the lynching experience. They lynched a few other people, but basically being lynched belonged to us. We were the only ones brought here to be slaves, and after slavery we were a people without rights. We were the only people who could be lynched with impunity. It's documented and it's not over yet.

I'm a physical person. I believe in strong statements. I believe in a certain amount of significant directness. Within the visual arts, the abstract work is very much in the area of fiction and poetry. You can put things together and in real life there would be no reason for them to be together, except in the reality of their being works of art. Once I had named them Lynch Fragments, it literally meant I could almost do anything within that title. As specific as the term lynching is, the situation is so dynamic. If somebody is going to discuss something violent—murder, sexual abuse, kidnapping, the destruction of all human rights, the destruction of life, snatching pieces off of a dead body for souvenirs, all the things done to men, women and children—then that subject is so powerful, I can use the strongest language I want. It's not like I chose to make sculpture about hearts and flowers or strolling through the park.

Once I have decided that my subject is lynching and Lynch Fragments, that calls into question the whole society. The whole of art, the whole everything.

LYNCH FRAGMENT I

My tongue whips blood through the
ribs of a cobra
I am a serpent
a parched cavity for lynched reptiles
iron rust of my musty scales sucking up the
secret strength of bad smells from two curved horns
clipped horns of a ram under
bent pipe of my passionate sloping bone which
is the beauty mask that god wears like
the four part sun rising redly to the tip of
frozen nerves heard beyond
muted cries of
mutilated flesh in a hole
a fox hole
a fixed hole where spirits erect themselves &
urinate inside my nostrils

IT CAME

It came through the frizzled feathers of sparkling hens
through blood red blood of asphalt earth
through navels infested with intestinal worms
through skulls infused with electric shock
It came
through the vibrating hum of empty stomachs
through raw buttocks slashed against rubber hoses
through a trench of wounded infants near Cassinga
through the last breath of the dead among dead bodies in
Chimoeo
It came
through boiling beer on scalded feet
through corn meal and maggots
through outbreaks of malaria and typhoid
through bombsplinters and blinding lights
through the quivering convulsive and hemorrhaging heads of
two hundred thousand refugees in transit
It came
through the splash of plastic gloves on the shallow water
through chests and legs and mutilated fingers floating in the
water
through eyepits of parasitical flies raging in the water
through chemicals illuminating in the water of the river
It came
through shattered bones of protesting students
through nasal spines in cockroach shit
through tropical babies in polluted milk
through the english knot of a hangman's rope
through testicles shaking into mouth of a supreme court of
supreme coldness
It came
through the smell of blue stones and used rifles
through the naked root of new trees and missiles
through a soldier's uniform
through a farmer's implement
through a white starched waiter's shirt
through a miner's helmet

through a woman's skirt
through Bindura and Pungue
and a curfew of darkness
the bazooka of victory came
Oh Zimbabwe it came

OGUN'S FRIEND

I saw your eyes like bumps of flint
i saw your shoes like high-top boulders
i saw your hands like faces of fire
i saw your fingers like axes of Shango
i saw your body like a rocker of steel

Yo
i heard a hum down there
i heard a rumble down there
i heard a ghost down there
i heard a thunderbolt expel down there
i heard a anvil in the night go hummmmmmmm
down there

Hey whose metals are shouting so loud
they must be the tapper that Ogun knows

whose are those beads so hot and black
they must be brass for Ogun to fill

who's that worker with corrugated gums
it must be the worker that Ogun chose

who's that one with feet like flames
it must be the welder that's Ogun's friend

Yo
i smell a chicken in here
i smell some charcoal in here
i smell a goat in here
i smell some wax in here
i smell a dog in here
i smell some clay and some oil and some blood in here

Hey i see your chains like links of teeth
crow-bars
i see your coils like female pouches
barbwire
i see your grills like braided snakes
fish-net
i see your ladder like a totem of pliers
crocodiles
i see your pipes like razors on tusks
wine bottles
i see your scissors and your keys on the table in there
uh-huhn

Yo
you got pant legs made into hats
you got diamond plates made into walls
you got straightening combs made into steps
you got hammer-heads made into skulls
you got flat-rings made into ears

Pant legs diamond plates
straightening combs hammer-heads
flat-rings
yo

I feel your flux
i feel your sander
i feel your drill bit
i feel your grinder
i feel your drill press
i feel your hack saw
i feel your brick ax

Yo
i saw your windows like sheets of steel
i heard a gong down there
i saw some navels like bushes of wire
i heard a bird down there

Hey
you got lizard tongues made into tongs
i feel your bald spot
you got snakeskins covered in bronze
i feel your chin marks

lizard tongues bald spots
snakeskins chin marks

Yo
i smell some fish in here
i see a rail down there
i smell some toes in here
i see a horn down there
i smell some funk in here
i see a knife down there
i smell some ratheads in here
i see a person down there

Whose that one so brown and fine
Ogun's friend
whose that one in green on green
Ogun's friend
whose that one who eats so fast
Ogun's friend
whose that one with toothpaste lips
Ogun's friend
whose that one who spits on tools
Ogun's friend
Yo Ogun's friend

LIZ DALTON
THE REVOLUTION WHICH WORKED

Women initiated culture. It was they who opened the door to human history. They did so through a sex strike whose banner was the blood of menstruation.

This is the claim of a just-published book by Chris Knight: *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture.** It is the story of a revolution which worked. It is a book which will provoke some to fury, others to delight. It is based on 25 years of research and debate, and a wealth of evidence from the new biology, primatology, archaeology, paleontology, social anthropology and the structural analysis of mythology. The author, a Marxist, an anthropologist and a man, makes no apology for any of this, but does acknowledge his debts to the women thinkers and activists—from scientists of almost every discipline to poets, witches and Greenham women—who have been and still are researching the same issues.

Engels wrote over a hundred years ago that in order to become culturally human, our animal ancestors had to overcome male sexual jealousy, which lay at the heart of all hierarchy, competition and conflict over sex and food in the animal world (Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*). Sex organized pre-human society. Chris Knight argues that "with the establishment of earliest culture, society at last succeeded in organizing sex."

When did this happen? Central to Chris Knight's book is the exciting debate now opening up on the dating of the birth of anatomically modern humanity. Becoming culturally human was not simultaneous with our evolutionary achievement of anatomical modernity—although of course the one was contingent on the other. All the evidence of the new paleontology, archaeology and molecular biology points to the same extraordinary conclusion: humanity in evolutionary terms is a tiny newborn baby.

*Yale University Press, 1991, $45.00.

Around 200,000 years ago the "African Eve" who mothered all of us (according to the newest genetic studies) appeared in the Afar Triangle in what is now Ethiopia. Neanderthals were still roaming in Northern Europe when we started moving around and out of Africa, to leave our fossilized bones 100,000 years later—and have them unearthed 100,000 years later still—in Israel at Qafzeh, and in South Africa at Klasies River Mouth. Those skeletons were like ours. Those ancestors' brains would have looked like ours. But these people had no home base, no organized division of labor, limited tool technology, and, the evidence suggests, only the barest rudiments, if any, of ritual—the collective symbolic action which Knight sees as the basis of all human language, kinship and culture.

Astonishingly, just about 60,000 years later, there is a mass of evidence of a cultural—and demographic—explosion having occurred. It was "the Upper Paleolithic revolution," which took off soon after the beginning of the last great Ice Age. Modern humans (the Cro-Magnons) were suddenly spreading across the world, in the space of a few thousand years moving from Africa to Asia and Australia to eastern and western Europe and finally to the Americas. They had home bases, domestic fires, sophisticated and developing tool kits, and an organized sexual division of labor. They not only talked; they also spoke poetry, played musical instruments, sang and danced, and decorated themselves with body-paint. Ritual, as "the collective dimension of intimate, emotionally significant life" (Knight) gave us our meaning. It defined us as human. We knew then how to rejoice in the achievement.

How did it happen? Scientists from every relevant discipline are at present puzzling over it. Knight sees it as a revolution: the successful outcome of a long struggle against our previous "animal" social organization.

As riverine and shoreline gatherers, scavengers and small game hunters, our ancestors of over 100,000 years ago could survive happily as long as the mild climate of the interglacial years provided us with food in abundance. Males, females, and even infants could almost equally gather what grew, lay or crawled around them. The failure of males to provision their sex-partners or offspring, in such a context, hardly mattered and could be tolerated. It was, after all, part of the natural order of things—for primates.

We were designed for paradise. In the tropics and sub-tropics, African Eve's children, naked and warm, played, swam, and picnicked on the beach. Knight supports Elain Morgan's hypothesis that we adapted to wading and swimming as we evolved along the lake shores of East Africa and the coasts

of the Afar Gulf. Significantly for his theory, he believes that our ancient association with rivers and the sea conditioned our own biological rhythms. Prior to the revolution which made us culturally human, Knight believes that females already had the biological capacity to synchronize their ovulatory and menstrual cycles with one another and with the tides. The tides, as everyone knows, are governed by the moon. So—there we gamboled, well-fed, sunburned and moonstruck.

But then, as eventually it always must, something else happened. The global climate began to change. It was the onset of the last Ice Age. Sea levels worldwide regressed. First at one place, then at another, our anatomically modern ancestors were forced by deteriorating environmental conditions to seek increasingly scarce food further inland. The natural order no longer worked—at least, not for the mothers and their infants. Cold, hungry, with their ultra-dependent offspring so much longer and heavier a burden than were the offspring of any other primates, the mothers started noticing bitterly with what ease the unfettered males travelled and could feed themselves. For there was plenty of food to eat. But it was no longer growing, lying or crawling. It was walking or running away. It was the era of big game, the golden age for the giant mammals roaming the plains, surviving all weathers as long as the grass did. And the males of our species were going hunting.

No, this is not another Man the Hunter origins myth, with man simultaneously inventing technology, culture and the nuclear family, and teaching it all to his dumb wife sitting at home with baby, waiting for the bacon. On the contrary. First it is not about Man or even Woman: it is about women organizing in solidarity with one another. Yes, it is about culture: how women's solidarity was at the core of it. And yes, it is also about the family: how women's solidarity exploded the "natural family" of most primate societies, in which the females are the sexual possessions of the male or males. Knight argues that the first human societies were communist. For him, as for Friedrich Engels, this means something historically specific (and nothing whatsoever to do with the monstrosity of Stalinism). Communism meant a society in which women—as never before or since—were free. Women collectively said No to rape, and men obeyed. Responsibility for children belonged to the whole community. Women's rule—matriarchy—in this sense meant freedom for everyone. Language, co-operation and science replaced physical coercion, animal individualism, and the rule of the genes.

How was this revolution achieved? Like all revolutions, Chris Knight argues: by going on strike. It was women who desperately needed change. They went on sex strike.

"They collectively refused sex whenever meat supplies were exhausted or men attempted to approach without meat" (Knight). They signalled No with the blood of menstruation; and the equation "Blood = No" simultaneously extended to the blood of game animals. Hunters must not eat their own kill. It must be returned to camp, handed to the collectivity of women, and cooked to remove all blood before being communally eaten. At one blow the women's strike action prompted the collective organization of men for the benefit of all; outlawed generalized or individual male dominance; and, in seeming paradox, separated sex from foodgetting. All forms of prostitution (individual sex-for-food bargaining) were banned. Women's bodies were sacred—to themselves and others. The food given by men to their sexual partners was then shared among the women's blood kin. A hunter had rights not in his own kill, but in the meat given him by his sisters, which they in turn had received from their partners. Heterosexual relations were enjoyed only in conditions free of need, when everyone had been fed.

The model explains at a single stroke menstrual and incest taboos and the origins of human kinship systems. Culture—collectively agreed rules and rituals governing society, something unknown in the animal world, and a unique breakthrough in evolution—was born.

Sex was subordinated to economics. As Chris Knight argues, this was necessarily women's initiative not because they enjoyed sex any less than men, but because, as every mother knows, when it comes to the crunch, the baby and its survival has to come first.

With this book the whole apparently mighty edifice of patriarchy is challenged at its roots. It can be seen as nothing more than a gigantic bluff (backed up of course by force) perpetuated on women since the end of early communism from around 10,000 years ago. Woman as the Other, as Nature, as outside or antithetical to culture, and ultimately, for the extremes or religion or fascism, as outside humanity—it is all a projection by a society which since the onset of male and class rule has been profoundly anti-woman, profoundly fearful of women's solidarity, and the socially transforming power which it engenders.

Blood Relations implicitly challenges the fear of femaleness which western feminism itself has not yet overcome. Can we ever be biologically whole, culturally human, and free to make whichever sexual choices we wish? The bland designer feminism which is dominant today provides only a grotesque pseudo-answer: the individual woman as super-commodity, in intense competition with every other woman, selling herself body and soul once more—but this time only to the highest bidders.

We can be whole and free. Because 40,000 years ago we were. We went on strike, not once, but every month. Our clock was the moon. The rhythm of our blood flow sent the men to hunt and us to our inner world where we could centre ourselves and be close, both sexually and spiritually. The men's rhythm, and their intragender closeness, mirrored ours. When the hunt was over, heterosexual relationships could be resumed. There was a time for every season.

The mechanical rhythms of capitalism are making us ill. That the present world is dying has become a cliché. While the rich stuff themselves or starve themselves, the poor just starve. War, pollution, disease, disaster, violence, rape, personal loneliness and misery stalk all our lives. Children expect the end of the world. Many are already suffering it. Our so-called "natural order" no longer works—at least, not for the vast majority of us. Cold, hungry, facing their children's questioning eyes, the poor of the world notice bitterly with what ease the super-rich travel and feed themselves. For there is plenty of food to eat. And the power of new technology is almost limitless. But it is all controlled and possessed by a tiny minority. It is the era of plenty, of superabundance. . . .

The ferment of new understandings about our beginnings of which this important book is a part could help us find our way—back to the future.

JORGE SANTIAGO PEREDNIK

THE SHOCK OF THE LENDERS (Main Fragment)

(Tr. from the Spanish by Molly Weigel)

The most beautiful word of the language is stranger
Barbaric or Barbara
All men are mortal the shock lender is also
The most beautiful concept of the mother tongue
Sabotage?
We lent
I tell you, not them
"Look for a new almost because the old one is dis "

Cards thrown down simulating an Order
Protean tense: the lapse
Preterite tense: the cosmos
ultrapreterite: the lapse
present: the preteriduction machine
such brief [illegible]
Something's stopp

Beauty is the order of sabotage. No
The order of beauty is an effect of sabotage. No
Beauty is a. . .from the order of sabotaging the order of. . .No?
The day is too clear to see what's happening
: a link in the chain has been broke
: crystals colors solstice equinox have been broke
Too clear to see
The fear what's hidden under always
Hell? concentric circles Why not Paradise?
""Don't believe him it's all a circumferences dis
setups of our police who I call dialing 666

"El Shock de los Lender" was published by Ediciones XUL, Buenos Aires, 1986.

and others call oligice
oligarchy
oligophrenia
oligoclase hematite mineraloligopoly(ce)
etc etc""

decentered circumferences crossing such that
each point is the intersection of multiple discs such that
each point constitutes an existence (note: you for example)

(nothingness—neeche— (the only—stirner—
bah—the story you tell is just too pat
in your guilt I smell a rat slither bite infect squeal
turn around, I'll make a note of that turn around so he can steal you
or better: Truth is tails Beauty heads
both faces the being—duplicity—coin of this cosmos
the man who relates the eye and the finger
the name that relates flash and bang
what's more important, thunder or lightning?
Great balls of fire, I thought you'd never say it!

weapons, instruments of
The providers, etc
The commotion, etc etc
The corollaries that some call History
1. not to put up any more with the paternal hoop of the self or the law
2. to penetr (pay a price) assassin (shoot a) ate it
3. to be (nomen atque omen) the social lenders of the cause of maximum shock

Ego non baptizo te in nomine Diaboli et
Filii et Spiritus non Sancti—sed in nomine
Patris—madness is only definable negatively
amniotic fluid on the bodies
with her sister reason useless extremes one and the same rain from above
—not the (black) art of the deceivers but rather ascetic magic

Casing the city of god in the name of economy
Looking for special deals with Intelligence or Power or Angel
Bribing: Pull the trigger! Kill! (I'm waiting)

discovering a new kind of weapon: that has no one to aim at
that has nothing to fire at
real weapons

CHORUS (intellectuals if possible)
The electrical charges called shocks
can be caused when the wires corrode
their mothers would like back their cocks
to get back some of what they are owed
Their crest illustrates as it mocks
two red lions attached to her nodes
as they try to get into her box

My good and merciful god, you know that I don't approve of this
That I don't approve of anything that offends you
Yet you will approve it: habit and greed
But lord, the heart of an upright man. . .I mean, the abominations. . .Leviticus VIII
Better sleep and dream

And the dream was: a sort of viaduct in the mountain
The watch casting its hands like arrows or syringes against the eyes
A horse with two blind heads quartering the body
And the dream was:
A horse with six feet two heads escaping one to the north the other to the south
Vanished. It was:
I was drawing trying to capture the landscape: that tree populated with birds against the horizon
Before (or first and not before) something had captured me: many birds no horizon
and the riders moving away one to the great salt marsh the other to the glacier on the same animal

Vanished. It was:
I was running with the spear which was a pencil in my hand
after the bird with white wings. Two wings
The order was to capture the bird draw it bring it back
transformed into a hero
The horse told me our hero will be two, and with us, three, the
great hero, the excluded
Vani It wa li an instant
Che Guevara is mixed up in this story Mickey Mouse is mi
Do you believe in Christ? Yes. And in Longfellow?
The shot of the blowgun. Again. The death blow.
The best allies of the Fathers are the Dead
Deadfellow: "the Man with the Great Beard has sent me up here
to
to test the effects of that is you know"

A man / ElseWhere?
Can / A man A man / Make / Social Revolution?
Can / A man / Make / Social Revolution / ElseWhere ElseWhere?

hero he who has won a battle and lost his and because of that
is a hero

The Topos Uranus, the King of Heaven, the Socialrevolutzie: the
Future the OtherPlace
The best allies of the Fathers are
weapons, instruments of
the owners of the sacred house
General Investment Company The Beyond. Everything goes
better with faith in Us.

"the Venture is the Adventure" they repeated "the Venture is the
Adventure" for thirty-eight minutes children
[laughing like crazy
And if the children were ri
"Shut up!" Signed: Destiny (S Freud Stars Religion Science Hitler
V. I. L. Buenito Mussolini the Race the
Party the Corporation ersatz hybrids etc don't
take another step against

against the)
Destiny
In God We Trust

Oremus:
Blessèd Abstraction Almighty Abstraction may you sustain our
lives and give them a purpose
the Mystery the House of Mist: (the other—or Go)Destiny
Tiny reason that establishes order
"It's natural for the many to submit to the few" could be used as
a subordinate
"for the many to submit to the only" it could be said that
"It's natural to use subordinates"
What many, Few and Only like, Order
That which identifies Everyone

"The Venture is the Adventure" they repeated "the Venture is the
Adventure"
"Shut Up !"

because. the desert. this ineffectual conspiracy of circumstances

Disguised as a boy who plays the flute
He asked if death were unitary or real
And she said: little is know about bodies, about matter
Behind a door there's another door and
Behind that door there's another door and
Behind
one more door and
Behind
there's

Obsessions

CHORUS (if possible, id., id.)
They gave their father forty licks
then took a scissors to his dick
those boys are full of dirty tricks
and this is how they get their kicks

If it's not broken, what's to fix?
They climbed up on their mama's back
and rode her all around the track
they said, we'll give you what you lack
our darling nymphomaniac
Their morals are a little slack
but they make up for it in tact
they may be just a pair of pricks
but they're our boys through thin and thick

Stupidity and Truth—what does this prove?
In the archetype someone empties himself, says
The duty of killing them *(solvere)*
Cutting the damned knot and solving the problem
That is not vanity

(Later, at the wake, the family will change the story
(They won't dissolve the raveled thread of a decayed knot into nothing
They won't say "the debts will be discharged. So it has been written."
"Someday you'll repay (resolve) everything I've done for you")
They'll tell it oh literature as the payment of a debt)
Not even to tell something at most a little something to say for example
poetry is not truth
not beauty
leaves someone burns against the cold

The adventure will be poetically: a writing that says:
the pick parted both sides of the cranium entered the secret vagina and reason shuddered
the enc*ephallic* tissue crossed the broken membrane showed the world its horrors and reason was
[xxxxx
and that man who had raised a family amounted to something in life
made great sacrifices for his children provided an education
even read Schiller in the original and Hegel's logic

only managed to say "Sometimes you forget that you are my
son"

The big raw chunks must be eliminated it must be served well
done
"today in school we baked cookies" says the oldest, five years
old. His
brother, three, replies, "and we had them half-baked"
laughter in the room. Coughs

"I've given you everything and I am nothing."
"Now I receive your gifts, which I do not deserve."

the end of the adventure will be:
the horse falling down and "this is how he throws a fit" say the
children kicking their legs
"you ran him too hard" the keeper accuses them "you profited
too much" pronounce the bankers of Amberes
"you've gone" sentences the executioner "too far"
a vehicle for crossing the dead of America *I will ride my father
for eight thousand kilometers*
an animal with a black forehead who throws a fit with his feet *If
he's no use he's got to be put down*
the burro the messiah will use to reach Jerusalem *He frightens
me he bites he has a big wee-wee*
the rolls royce of the magnates? *If He's No Use He's Got to Be Put
Down*

Because they can't connect the beginning with the end, observed
subinspector Alcmeon,
the shocklenders die
that's why so many die—so many—and we don't understand
why.
Nothing connects with nothing.

The end of the adventure will be: the adventure doesn't end
It's the fourth psychic instance, it's the mystery
decentered circumferences crossing such that
"Sometimes you forget that I am your son

Machines that make the past present such that
"Very few, unfortunately"

The adventure will be poetically: a writing that says: Too clear to
see
The opening Two points
Where the father has been there the son is resurrected
The two cords the knot cut *is printed*
"no, don't print it!" "Forget!"

His cloudied storied

NOTE

*The Shock of the Lender*s, by Jorge Santiago Perednik, takes as its point of departure a 1981 murder case that became a national sensation in Argentina. The Shoklenders were an upper-middle class educated family displaying all the outward signs of success: the father, Mauricio, was an engineer; they lived in a fashionable Buenos Aires neighborhood; there were three children. On May 30th, 1981, a neighbor followed a thin trail of blood to the bodies of Mauricio and his wife Cristina in the trunk of the family car. The two sons, Sergio and Pablo, were missing. A countrywide search began, and in a few days both sons were apprehended on horseback, one having fled to the north, the other to the south. The trial uncovered many skeletons in the family closet, including possible incestuous relations between Cristina and both sons, and the involvement of Mauricio's engineering firm in international arms traffic. The poem uses the case, with its oedipal and mythical overtones and its questioning of the status quo (which can only be maintained through a systematic repression), as a pretext to explore the psychological and political nature of authority, specifically but not exclusively the military government's dirty war in which an estimated 30,000 civilians "disappeared" between 1976 and 1983. Beginning with its Spanish title—*El Shock de los Lende*r—the poem proposes a dialogue between Spanish and English, in which the English words lend a shock to an anesthetized language and a society that can't see the meaning of its own story. The poem is composed of six fragments, of which the "Main Fragment" is the first and longest, comprising roughly one third of the whole. In its form as well as its themes, the poem interrogates itself about the possibility of completion, ending, and wholeness—and about the possibility of telling stories.

ANDREW SCHELLING
TWO POEMS

PHILIP WHALEN

. . . . . .

Long after our current apocalypse ended—

the planet yet bore his trace—
the yogin's roar of awakening, old anchorite eye twinkle,
    hilarity of one
just passing through

spel & charm, haiku and curses, sutras of trenchant abuse
but most notorious were the gathas of valor & outrage—

O wielding Mahavairochana's malachite cudgel!
eating up worlds in the journey
        from one verbal construct to another—

. . . . . .

I enter a room
Zenshin Ryufu sits in a straight-back chair
black robe, spectacles
bare feet planted on a dragon rug
approaching I raise my hands in *gasho*
he produces an empty
long-stem wine glass from under his skirt
extends it towards me and
rotating his wrist

upends it
I bow again and go out

(drum)

. . . . . .

At that time they say
there existed a few ruined libraries, one or two books—

28:iii:92

THE TRANSLATION

And dream'd my friend L, her hair feathered raven—
shifted from frame to frame of the dream, or was it from room to room drifted,
dancing, striking both ends of an earthenware drum.
Pakhaavajam mirdang—
slung by a sash over the shoulder, its skins sensitized
with a paste of wet flour.
The same as Mirabai carried, whose thin *nagari* letters and abductive melodies
for weeks had consumed
the waking hours—

Then awoke to bright snow, ice over the mountains. Fretted with January pine.
Hindi student and silk merchant, my friend waited for me with a battery of books on a hillside. I trudged up
to reach him—through dry, calf-deep snow, rucksack of books on my back.

He holds modern Hindi, I the polished old Sanskrit. We looped
Subhalakshmi through the tape deck, over
and over, following the weave of her medieval Mira. Like using
Chrétien de Troyes and one's handy
American, to come at Chaucer from either end. Intricate Hindi,
coiled Rajasthani Mira once sang, a wound
to the skull.

Could *she* have wakened one morning, in the 16th century,
two blinking poets surrounded by snow to trouble her sleep into
waking—
karmically caught in those songs?
The scholars will cringe.
But Mira continues to rage out her lyric heart on the roads,
declaring her
singular fever—*Shyam,*
the Dark One, o color of raven—

. . . . . .

night

the moon a demon, noc-

turnal being

. . . . . .

to remove the veil

to have the veil on

XAVIER VILLAURRUTIA
from *NOSTALGIA FOR DEATH* (1938)

(Tr. from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger)

L.A. NOCTURNE: THE ANGELS

for Augustín J. Fink

You might say the streets flow sweetly through the night.
The lights are dim so the secret will be kept,
the secret known by the men who come and go,
for they're all in on the secret
and why break it up in a thousand pieces
when it's so sweet to hold it close,
and share it only with the one chosen person.

If, at a given moment, everyone would say
with one word what he is thinking,
the six letters of DESIRE would form an enormous luminous scar,
a constellation more ancient, more dazzling than any other.
And that constellation would be like a burning sex
in the deep body of night,
like the Gemini, for the first time in their lives,
looking each other in the eyes and embracing forever.

Suddenly the river of the street is filled with thirsty creatures;
they walk, they pause, they move on.
They exchange glances, they dare to smile,
they form unpredictable couples. . .

There are nooks and benches in the shadows,
riverbanks of dense indefinable shapes,
sudden empty spaces of blinding light
and doors that open at the slightest touch.

For a moment, the river of the street is deserted.
Then it seems to replenish itself,
eager to start again.
It is a paralyzed, mute, gasping moment,
like a heart between two spasms.

But a new throbbing, a new pulsebeat
launches new thirsty creatures on the river of the street.
They cross, crisscross, fly up.
They glide along the ground.
They swim standing up, so miraculously
no one would ever say they're not really walking.

They are angels.
They have come down to earth
on invisible ladders.
They come from the sea that is the mirror of the sky
on ships of smoke and shadow,
they come to fuse and be confused with men,
to surrender their foreheads to the thighs of women,
to let other hands anxiously touch their bodies
and let other bodies search for their bodies till they're found,
like the closing lips of a single mouth,
they come to exhaust their mouths, so long inactive,
to set free their tongues of fire,
to sing the songs, to swear, to say all the bad words
in which men have concentrated the ancient mysteries
of flesh, blood and desire.

They have assumed names that are divinely simple.
They call themselves *Dick* or *John, Marvin* or *Louis.*
Only by their beauty are they distinguishable from men.
They walk, they pause, they move on.
They exchange glances, they dare to smile.
They form unpredictable couples.

They smile maliciously going up in the elevators of hotels,
where leisurely vertical flight is still practiced.
There are celestial marks on their naked bodies:
blue signs, blue stars and letters.

They let themselves fall into beds, they sink into pillows
that make them think they're still in the clouds.
But they close their eyes to surrender to the pleasures of their
mysterious incarnation,
and when they sleep, they dream not of angels but of men.

Los Angeles, 1936

NOCTURNE: THE BEDROOM

Death always takes the shape
of our bedroom.

It is concave and dark, silent and warm,
it gathers in the curtains where the shadows take shelter,
it is hard in the mirror and icy and tense,
deep in the pillows, white in the sheets.

We both know that death takes the shape
of our bedroom, and that in our bedroom
there's a cold space that erects
a wall, a crystal, a silence between us.

Then, only I know that death
is the hollow you leave in our bed
when suddenly, for no reason,
you sit up, or you stand.

And it is the crackling of burning leaves
your bare feet make across the rug.

And it is the sweat that wets our thighs
that lock and struggle and then surrender.

And it is the sentence you interrupt and let drop.
And my question you don't hear,
you don't understand, you don't answer.

And the silence that falls and entombs you
as I watch over your sleep and wonder.

And I, only I, know that death
is the choked words, the strange groans
and the obscure involuntary movements you make
when you wrestle the angel of sleep in your sleep.

Death is all this and more that encircles us,
and brings us together, pulls us apart,
and finally leaves us confused, startled, hanging,
with a wound that doesn't bleed.

Then, only then, both of us alone know
that it is not love, but darkening death
that makes us look, face and face in each other's eyes,
and reach and come together, more than alone and stranded,
still more, and each time more, even still.

NOTE

Xavier Villaurrutia (1903-1950) is, with José Gorostiza, the major Mexican poet from the generation before Octavio Paz, and a leading light of the group and magazine known as the Contemporáneos (Contemporaries) in the late 1920s and 1930s. He essentially wrote one book of poetry, *Nostalgia for Death* (1938, expanded 1946), a scattering of other poems, and many hundreds of pages of criticism and mediocre plays. He was one of the only writers in Latin America in the first half of the century who was publicly gay, and his "L.A. Nocturne" is probably the first poem of interest written in that city. Copper Canyon will be publishing my translation of the complete *Nostalgia for Death,* in one volume with Octavio Paz' book-length study of the poet, *Hieroglyphs of Desire,* translated by Esther Allen.

—EW

PAUL VIOLI
SIDESHOW

Call me Zeno, Call me Hubert,
Call me Hubert The Bold.
I've got stock, I've got a story,
I've got a carpet.
I've got a blood-red star
in the middle of my carpet
and a moral for my story.

I've got inventory.
Here's a dagger
carved from a single diamond.
Here's an inflated goatskin
you can bounce higher
than a goat ever jumped.
Look at this:
a mechanical calculator,
a pair of woes-colored glasses,
and—I've got contrariety.

Here—Snide kind perceptive
obtuse persnickety sloppy
stolid emotional convivial
glum generous stingy
alackadaisical
impulsive—Have some contrariety.

I've got pig tusks with more loops
than the loves of a sophist.
And I've got a story.

I've got integrity.
I've got poems written on paper!
Paper made from the same reeds
I used to make my pen and flute.
I've got the latest postal rates.
Who put these plump
and solemn nudes on postage stamps?

Who knows what songs
filled their eyes
with dust and steel?
I believe in serious mail.

I'm a sojourner.
I got pepper, I've got struction,
instruction and obstruction.
Here's a picture of a queen.
Why is she so pale?
She swallowed
her dead lover's ashes.
You're boggled?
I, too, am boggled.
But I've got a better story.
A story from Asia Minor.

In a busy cafe a man
studies a geometry textbook
and sobs; he turns
a tear-splattered page,
crying aloud to his lone self,
My god, I'm such a creep, such a fool!

That's a story
but it's not from Asia Minor.
And it's not my style.
I call my intimate scrawl
Decembrics.
It's wintry, disinterested,
and usually ends in a scream.

More like Febrarrries,
come to think of it.
It grows from a trunk
to a limb to a branch to a twig
and then you're on your own.

A good story
gets right to the point
and allows for friction, thematics,
anthems for a dream-shorn age,
Java sex, gods and money,
all sorts of interference,
and who shaved my cat?

There are sloppy plots
or relaxing plots
that make you feel you spent
the afternoon fishing,
that you made the fishhooks
yourself, out of the bones
of your enemies.

How cruel.
But not my story.
My story is not like any of those.
My story is from Asia Minor.

A man searches
and finally finds Love
crouched under a tree
sipping vodka with a spoon.

You must try this, says Love,
and the man tries it.
Now, how do you feel? Love asks.
More than silly, says the man.
I have better things to do.
Good for you, Love tells him.
Now scram.

Now that's my idea
of a *bad* love story.
It's too long.
And there's no shrinkage:
Where's the impossibility?
Where's Love's emblem:
a dying fire in melting snow?

Furthermore, it has no Henceforth,
no Whereas, no Heretofore.
I've got Interference,
I've got blunder and philosophy
and I've got a sample.

A man stands in a field.
An arrow flies by.
He wonders about the path
it didn't leave in the air.
That was my life, he says.
—You saw it, didn't you?—
My very own streak.
And he runs off to find
where it landed.
Now you've got a pang without a plot.
You've got maximum vexation.
But no story.

Trust me.
I'm rankled but confident.
I'm trying to write a poem;
I'm dancing with a lunatic.
I've got a life of scrivitude,
red fracas and a craving.
I've got countercharge,
a wrist-watch and swamp-light.
I crave lucidity.
I'm a philophosphorer.
To live is to think, said Cicero.
But I think eternity
is haunted by a pebble.

Look to your cold self,
it's the wind
and the sand it holds
carving its gentle malisons in stone.
I have a scale to weigh that stone,
and a plot
interrupted by a series
of iridescent blots,

and enjambed stanzas
that protract, slide
through your hands like prayer,
like a jolly stranger in the dark.
Can Time and Money
dance more intimately?

First, beware.
There's ruption,
There's eruption and abruption,
but no delay.
There's grief and rumpus.
There's deep purple
and Arachne.

Smart cookie, Arachne,
but could she help herself?
Stories so fragrant
a god slashed her face.
What was worse,
to keep the skill
but lose yourself?
Rapt in your craft,
oblivious to all else?
Rival the almighty
or fake humility?

These are holy predicaments.
Shuddering consequences!
Defiance and tragedy,

fear and manipulation.
Let's forget that story.
Forget I ever mentioned it.

Instead, let me tell you
about propaganda, germ warfare,
didactic streaks
and Alexander the Great, the
Intrepid, the Insatiable.
I'll make it quick.

0 sad to see his soldiery
stricken with plague,
he—ever resourceful,
ever thrifty—
catapulted the contagious dead
over enemy walls
with little poems,
mockeries,
stuffed in their mouths.
How demoralizing!
You don't know
what a didactic streak is
until you've seen one of those
coming at you.

But the story doesn't begin
until he returns
loaded with justifying treasure
to his homeport.

Invitations rang true
to any and all
who might doubt his triumph and his valour.
They filled the hall
and fidgeted amid jewels,
astrolabes, and gold; ink-gulpers,
and inflated goatskins
that they could bounce

higher than a scapegoat;
and a carpet
that wherever it's unrolled
marks the center of the world.

All had arrived
except the one—the rowdy monk,
the tedious drunk,
the green-toothed belligerent
who lived in a barrel, the one
with whom the Great A
couldn't wait
to conversate: Phrastus.

Disdain personified,
Phrastus the Intransig—
the In. . .trans. . .sigitent
the Intranstigient
the Inrtrans. . .nigitent
Phrastus the Intransigent!
The Fearless A,
The Vanquisher of the World,
couldn't wait.

Finally he appeared,
unkempt, unwashed, cantankerous
and tanked: The essential Phrastus.
He staggered where no other
dared step, onto the carpet
that, all agreed,
marked the center of the world.

But all eyes were neither on him
nor his host.
They were fixed on the glass
he carelessly waved overhead,
on the wine
that sloshed against the rim
as if it were the tidal wave
that carried off half of Crete.

Now we don't just have
interference,
we've got Catalytic Interference!
We've got a hullabaloo
to contemplate,
with everybody's yo-yo eyes
played and yanked
by a glass of wine
—one drop of which, one stain
would blot out the star
at the center of the world.

So what happens next?
Who knows what happens next?
Maybe I forgot.
Maybe not.
What if the story bifurcates?
What if we have severe bifurcation?

But no, Phrastus
plops himself down
on the stellar center
and—What does he say?
He says, "What have we here?
A magical carpet!"

And then, do you know
what The Triple Great A does?
He proclaims: "If it be magic,
it works at the command of might."

But Phrastus says, "No,
it is a supreme magic,
for I just saw it
make the conqueror of the world
fear a little glass of wine."

Now what do you think happens?
The story simply can't. . .

Can it?
Who knows?
Do I know?
Perhaps.
Perhaps not.
This is the part I love.

1993-1994

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DAN FEATHERSTON
POMEGRANATE

the peel is dented, wrinkled like crêpe
or creased leather;
roots buckling red soil?

bruised black by air, mottled with rot
as if shifting magma—
red earthplates
and oceans glossed in light.

*

the pomegranate hollows from having been sealed.
seeds rattle and rot in their membranes.

fruit merged with air dries,
becomes airlike,
tho sealed secret still.

*

'I prefer my heart to be broken'

DHL, your words still penetrate,
for there are, still, parts of this world,
and parts of myself
unopened
tho ripe.

your fissured pomegranate widens
while this, sealed in peel, rots.

*

how is this myself?
how was a thing like this,
your Tuscany pomegranate,
yourself?

this is, as you said, the seal of a dawn kaleidoscopic.
opened, it unfolds its wet light—
pomegranate-color that is dawn:
the onslaught of moment.

*

this is pomegranate time.
this rotting must be done with;
I expedite weather, the sky's pulp-red heart of dawn,
with these suns, these seedlike eyes of light.

there is no other agent but myself.
the fissure!
seeds— drops of wet fire.
a grove packt into a globe!

there is nothing but immediacy,
nothing but this flame-blusht
fruit's sulphur-knob of fire.

*

the fissure is a cave clustered with seed
like red bats asleep in the earth.

what are their dreams?

what is the ratio of fruit-to-seed
but a thing to its multiple births?

I am this warehouse of seed torn open,
this pulpy nest, grotto of eyes.

*

the peel is burnt orange, as if tumbled flames
frozen in a globed gate of fire.

a fermented air locked in the fruit escapes,
as if a ghat-skull punctured by a stave.
air like soul.
ferment: a kind of combustion.

*

many seeds have rotted, like the body
turned in on itself—
the heart's closure,
a kind of hermetic cancer.

broken, the world rushes in,
into this fissure, this dawn,
as if a tree of light
uncoils from the sun.

JOSE LEZAMA LIMA
THOUGHTS IN HAVANA

(Tr. from the Spanish
by James Irby)

Because I dwell in a whisper like a set of sails,
a land where ice is a reminiscence,
fire cannot hoist a bird
and burn it in a conversation calm in style.
Though that style doesn't dictate to me a sob
and a tenuous hop lets me live in bad humor,
I will not recognize the useless movement
of a mask floating where I cannot,
where I cannot transport the stonecutter or the doorlatch
to the museums where murders are papered
while the judges point out the squirrel
that straightens its stockings with its tail.
If a previous style shakes the tree,
it decides the sob of two hairs and exclaims:
mi alma no está en un cenicero.

Any memory that is transported,
received like a galantine from the obese ambassadors of old,
will not make us live like the broken chair
of the lonesome existence that notes the tide
and sneezes in autumn.
And the size of a loud laugh,
broken by saying that its memories are remembered,
and its styles the fragments of a serpent
that we want to solder together
without worrying about the intensity of its eyes.
If someone reminds us that our styles
are already remembered;
that through our nostrils no subtle air thinks forth
but rather that the Aeolus of the sources elaborated

by those who decided that being
should dwell in man,
without any of us
dropping the saliva of a danceable decision,
though we presume like other men
that our nostrils expel a subtle air.
Since they dream of humiliating us,
repeating day and night with the rhythm of the tortoise
that conceals time on its back:
you didn't decide that being should dwell in man;
your God is the moon
watching like a bannister
as being enters into man.
Since they want to humiliate us we say to them:
el jefe de la tribu descendió la escalinata.

They have some show windows and wear some shoes.
In those show windows they alternate the mannequin with the
[stuffed ossifrage,
and everything that has passed through the forehead
of the lonesome buffalo's boredom.
If we don't look at the show window, they chat
about our insufficient nakedness that isn't worth a figurine from
[Naples.
If we go through it and don't break the glass,
they don't stress amusingly that our boredom can break the fire
and they talk to us about the living model and the parable of the
[ossifrage.
They who carry their mannequins to all the ports
and who push down into their trunks the screeching
of stuffed vultures.
They don't want to know that we climb up along the damp roots
[of the fern
—where there are two men in front of a table; to the right,
[the jug
and the bread that has been caressed—,
and that though we may chew their style,
no escogemos nuestros zapatos en una vitrina.

The horse neighs when there's a shape

that comes in between like a toy ox,
that keeps the river from hitting it on the side
and kissing the spurs that were a present
from a rosy cheeked adulteress from New York.
The horse doesn't neigh at night;
the crystals it exhales through its nose,
a warm frost, of paper;
the digestion of the spurs
after going through its muscles now glassy
with the sweat of a frying pan.
The toy ox and the horse
hear the violin, but the fruit doesn't fall
squashed on their backs that are rubbed
with a syrup that is never tar.
The horse slips over the moss
where there is a table exhibiting the spurs,
but the perked up ear of the beast doesn't decipher.

The calm with stumble music
and drunken circus horses in a tangle,
where the needle bites because there's no leopard
and the surge of the accordion
elaborates some tights of worn taffeta.
Though the man doesn't leap, there's a sound
of divided shapes in each indivisible season,
because the violin leaps like an eye.
The motionless jugs stir up a cartilaginous echo:
the shepherd's blue belly
is displayed on a tray of oysters.
In that echo of the bone and the flesh, some snorts
come out covered with a spiderweb disguise,
for the delight of the one whose mouth opens,
like the bamboo flute elaborated
by the boys always asking for something.
They ask for a hollow darkness
to sleep in, splitting open, with no sensitivity,
the style of their mothers' bellies.
But while they sharpen a spiderweb sigh

inside a jug passing from hand to hand,
the scratch on the lute doesn't decipher.

He indicated some moldings
that my flesh preferred to almonds.
Some delicious moldings riddled with holes
by the hand that wraps them
and sprinkles them with the insects that will accompany it.
And that waiting, waited for in the wood
by its absorption that doesn't stop the horseman,
while not some masks, the axecuts
that do not reach the moldings,
which do not wait like an axe or a mask,
but like the man who waits in a house of leaves.
But as he traced the cracks in the molding
and rendering glory to the parsley and the canary,
l'étranger nous demande le garçon maudit.

The musk ox itself knew the entrance,
the thread of three secrets
continued till it reached the terrace
without seeing the burning of the grotesque palace.
Does a door collapse because the drunken man
with no boots on yields to it his dream?
A muddy sweat fell from the shafts
and the columns crumbled in a sigh
that scattered their stones as far as the brook.
The roofs and the barges
safeguard the calm liquid and the chosen air;
the roofs that are friends of the toy tops
and the barges that anchor in a truncated backland,
scatter in confusion caused by a stuffed gallantry that
[catches unawares
the weaving and the obverse of the eye shivering together
[in masks.

To think that some crossbowmen
shoot at a funeral urn
and that from the urn leap

some pale people singing,
because our memories are already remembered
and we ruminate with a very bewildered gravity
some moldings that came out of the hunter's pecked siesta.
To know whether the song is ours or the night's,
they want to give us an axe elaborated in the sources of Aeolus.
They want us to leap from that urn
and they also want to see us naked.
They want that death they have given us as a gift
to be the source of our birth,
and our obscure weaving and undoing
to be remembered by the thread of the woman beset by suitors.
We know that the canary and the parsley make a glory
and that the first flute was made from a stolen branch.

We go through ourselves
and having stopped point out the urn and the doves
engraved in the chosen air.
We go through ourselves
and the new surprise gives us our friends
and the birth of a dialectic:
while two dihedrals spin and nibble each other,
the water strolling through the canals of our bones
carries our body toward the calm flow
of the unnavigated land,
where a waking alga tirelessly digests a sleeping bird.
It gives us friends that a light rediscovers
and the square where they converse as they sleep.
From that urn maliciously donated,
there come leaping couples, contrasts and the fever
grafted into the magnet bodies
of the crazy page boy making a slick torture even more subtle.
My shame, the magnet horns smeared with a cold moon,
but the scorn gave birth to a cipher
and now unconsciously swung on a branch.
But after offering his respects,
when two-headed people, crafty, correct,
strike with algal hammers the tenor-voiced android,
the chief of the tribe descended the staircase.

The beads they have given us as gifts
have fortified our own poverty,
but since we know we are naked
being will come to rest upon our crossed steps.
And while they were daubing us in wild colors
so we would leap out of the funeral urn,
we knew that as always the wind was rippling the waters
and some steps were following with delight our own poverty.
The steps fled with the first questions of sleep.
But the dog bitten by light and by shadow,
by tail and head;
the dog of dark light that cannot engrave it
and of stinking shadow; the light doesn't refine it
nor does the shadow nurture it: and so it bites
the light and the fruit, the wood and the shadow,
the mansion and the son, breaking the buzz
when the steps go away and he knocks at the portico.
Poor silly river that finds no way out,
nor the doors and leaves swelling their music.
It chose, double against single, the cursed clods,
but I don't choose my shoes in a show window.

As it lost its shape on the leaf
the worm sniffed and inspected its old home;
as it bit the waters that had come to the defined river,
the hummingbird touched the old moldings.
The violin of ice shrouded in reminiscence.
The colibri unbraids a music and ties a music.
Our forests don't force man to become lost,
the forest is for us a harmonium in reminiscence.
Every naked man that comes along the river,
in the current or in the glassy egg,
swims in the air if he suspends his breath
and stretches out indefinitely his legs.
The mouth of the flesh of our wood
burns the rippled drops.
The chosen air is like an axe
for the flesh of our wood,
and the hummingbird pierces it.

My back is irritated and furrowed by the caterpillars
that chew some wicker changed into a centurion fish,
but I go on working the wood,
like a sleepless fingernail,
like a harmonium that ties and unbraids in reminiscence.
The forest, breathed upon,
releases the hummingbird of the instant
and the old moldings.
Our wood is a toy ox;
the city state is today the state and a small forest.
The guest breathes upon the horse and the rains, too.
The horse rubs its muzzle and its tail over the harmonium of the
[forest;
the naked man intones his own poverty,
the colibri stains and pierces him.
My soul is not in an ashtray.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

> Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours, more necessary for us.
>
> —José Martí, "Nuestra América" (1891)

> Trees made into story, venerable leaves that in the landscape of America take on the value of a writing where a statement about our destiny is consigned.
>
> —José Lezama Lima, *La experiencia americana* (1957)

"Pensamientos en la Habana" first appeared in the third issue (Fall 1944) of *Orígenes*, the literary magazine Lezama had founded with his friend José Rodríguez Feo, and was later included in Lezama's book of

poems *La fijeza* (1949). Like many of his writings of the forties and fifties, it contains meditations on what the sources and nature of a poetic tradition of the New World might be. The reader may wonder why a translation from Spanish still contains lines in Spanish (the end lines of the first three stanzas). In the original those lines were in English and then were translated into the language of the poem (in different order) as the end lines of stanzas nine, ten and twelve; hence my transposition of the languages here.

This is a dense, teeming poem that powerfully transforms its materials as it goes, at times very obscurely, at times with relative clarity. Two immediately visible sequences in it help the reader mark stages in that transformation. One sequence is traced by the italicized end lines of all stanzas but one, lines that suggest shifts to other modes of utterance, quoting or translating or decanting something that has gone before or is yet to come. The other sequence is traced in stanzas two and three and eight through ten by the conflicting assertions and activities of a "we" and a "they."

From the mid-nineteenth century on, a confrontation of "nosotros" and "ellos" in Hispanic American writing often signified "we Latin Americans" versus "they the Americans of the United States," with a whole array of connotations ("we" represent culture, "they" materialism, "we" the invaded, "they" the invaders, etc.). Here the alignment seems different, both broader and more particular: "they" are the owners of cultural goods displayed like merchandise or museum pieces, the manipulators of cultural memory, the imposers of old myths that humiliate "us" and deny "our" humanity, oblivious of "our" capacity to be as at the first moment of Creation and create from "our" nature (in all senses) new myths.

But my choice of traits identifying "us" and "them" is too clear, not just because expositorily selective but because the poem has such a strong tendency to break its own continuities with eruptions that seem to scatter all paradigms, including those that establish relations between the culturally familiar and the culturally unfamiliar. There are many cryptic uses of definite articles with nouns as if they had been introduced earlier or as if they were antonomasias alluding to well known entities. With this goes another strong tendency to fragment other texts, even pulverize them almost invisibly, mixing their particles into the poem as implicit quotations and redistributing their sense. Some are prestigious texts of the Western tradition, such as Genesis ("we know we are naked" or "the wind. . .rippling the waters" in stanza ten) or Greek myth ("the thread of the woman beset by suitors," in stanza eight) or Baudelaire. "Straightens its stockings" in stanza one echoes, I think, the phrase "ajustant bien leurs bas" in Baudelaire's "Les Phares." Lezama twice quoted in essays of his lines from "Les Phares" containing those words, which allude to grotesque figures in a painting by Goya. "Les Phares" is a museum poem, a poem about works

handed down, about cultural transmission. The first three stanzas of Lezama's poem extensively develop in a very different way the word motifs "museums," "previous styles," "memory. . .transported," "memories. . . remembered," etc.

Other texts so treated belong more to a Latin American tradition. For example, I think particles from the third poem of Martí's *Versos sencillos* ("Odio la máscara y vicio / de mi corredor de hotel. . .") are embedded in Lezama's poem, as well as Martí's movement there away from false value toward his sacred temple of the forest ("máscara" occurs in Lezama's first stanza and Martí's "molduras"—parts of the temple, wood fashioned—recur in Lezama's later stanzas, along with "bosque"). That movement of Martí's was prophetic: he was to die in battle in the interior of Cuba, in the "monte." In his last diaries the sense of nature becomes supernatural but subtle, precise, as in his notation of April 18, 1895, about the music of the forest at night, an ecstatic contribution to that muted symphony of natural sounds the critic Samuel Feijóo has studied in 19th century Cuban poetry, much of the vocabulary of which—murmurs, echoes, sobs, sighs, breaths, etc.— runs through Lezama's poem, radically (but still allusively) transposed. Another hidden or presupposed Cuban "text" that enigmatically breaks into this poem is that of Lezama's own private memories and associations. See, in this regard, his essay "Confluences" that I translated in *Sulfur* #25, where he ascribes the line "The violin of ice shrouded in reminiscence" (stanza eleven) to a context of family heirlooms and oral traditions that also resonates with other moments of "Thinking Thoughts in Havana."

The poem moves from an initial stanza of tense blockage, of first person singular caught up in negatives (". . .where I cannot, / where I cannot. . .") and an elaborate syntax of subordinations ("Because. . . Though. . . If. . .") to the final two stanzas made up of a calm litany of shorter and syntactically much simpler statements about forest, wood, river, man, "we," "I" and a few animals and instruments: a "poverty" made and unmade in "reminiscence." To suggest something of how the poem works from one state to the other, I will draw two brief comparisons with Lezama's novel *Paradiso* (1966).

Toward the end of chapter XI of *Paradiso* (pp. 355ff in the English translation), José Cemi's "exercise of poetry, the verbal quest of unknown finality" is enacted not as a writing activity nor even mainly as a verbal activity but rather as his contemplation of objects on display (mostly human or animal figurines), in shop windows on the street or in glass cases at home (the Spanish word "vitrina" used in the poem may mean either of these means of display). But these objects are not seen as static but rather as forming extremely dynamic and changing configurations or "agrupamientos," acting upon one another and driven by "currents of force" that are their own

and not their contemplator's (at one point individual words are said to behave for Cemí like these objects). In stanzas two and three of the poem, there are literally displays, of course, but the interaction of objects beginning there seems to carry over with greater complexity in stanzas four through seven, now free of that sense of display and observation or of the claims and counterclaims of "we" and "they." The objects become subjects or actants and wildly undergo physical contacts, interpenetrations, ingestions, expulsions, dismemberments, in a kind of surreal mechanics of destruction and reassembly (I think here of the bodies and mixtures in Deleuze's *Logique du sens).*

The other aspect of *Paradiso* is its tendency to render the sexual in grotesque, even demonic terms which are exorcized or displaced (José Cemí as such has no sexual experiences: those phases of his *Bildung* are undergone in contiguity for him by his alter egos Fronesis and Foción). In the poem, with the return of the "we" / "they" dialectic in stanzas eight through ten, part of what "they" would impose upon "us" as contents of the repeatedly mentioned "funereal urn" (like a sinister horn of plenty, like a Pandora's box) are "leaping couples, contrasts and the fever / grafted into . . .magnet bodies," as if the masters of Western culture (if that is who "they" are) were also imposing on "us" sex and guilt, here too seen as grotesque. I stress this because I think that in its final two stanzas "Thoughts in Havana" arrives at (or projects) a kind of non-Biblical Eden (no serpent, no woman) or sui generis pastoral: a mythical state beyond sex or genealogy or inheritance, a state of self-engendering similar to what Lezama called in his 1964 interview with Armando Alvarez Bravo (which I translated in *Sulfur* #24) an "Idumaean" reproduction not by couples but by spontaneous vegetal growth from the body.

There is much, much more to speak of in this poem (such as its implicit transformation of the Cartesian *cogito* at the beginning or its colibri / hummingbird as a diminutive New World Prometheus and "piercer" of obstacles at the end), but I leave that for another time.

BARBARA GUEST
THE SURFACE AS OBJECT

the visible
as in the past

subsisting in layered zone
refuses to dangle
oaths on marsh field

whitened or planned
memorial distance

rather than vine
that which proliferates
the bittersweet grapple
initiates
a mysterious mesh
forbids the instant disclosure
delays a humid course
or, creates a patina
jungleware.

or, she moving forward into
the line of sticks
circled by sticks
her hand flies up
in the direct line of sticks
odor of lines.

knowing the difficulty
annexation of Egypt
oaths on marsh fields etc.

a possible intimacy with
the tomblike fragrance of stone
the cult-like
expressiveness.

(the perpendicular
millimeter stone
less raw

or, gangling
as the artful
lessening surprised.)

tree grown guava
oaths on marsh field
the hungry minstrel and the forager
gold on the guava lick of rosin
and the chill latched thicket
grunt marsh weed
regardez-la
the untamed ibis.

JOEL-PETER WITKIN
STATEMENT

> "...heroism is the natural condition of the poet, that the poet is only a servant of the power of a force that drives him and that a true servant never abandons his master but follows him even to the scaffold."
>
> —Jean Cocteau

What I have always wanted was to give something to life that wasn't there before. My passion is to make beautiful, indelible photographs based on my life's need.

I live in the world, but it is more that the world lives in me. I make my own reality because truth is not in the world—it is within us and in eternal life. The manifestation of deepest truth we find inside is what we all must ultimately share with others, in whatever form that takes. The artist is not a special kind of human, but every human a special kind of artist.

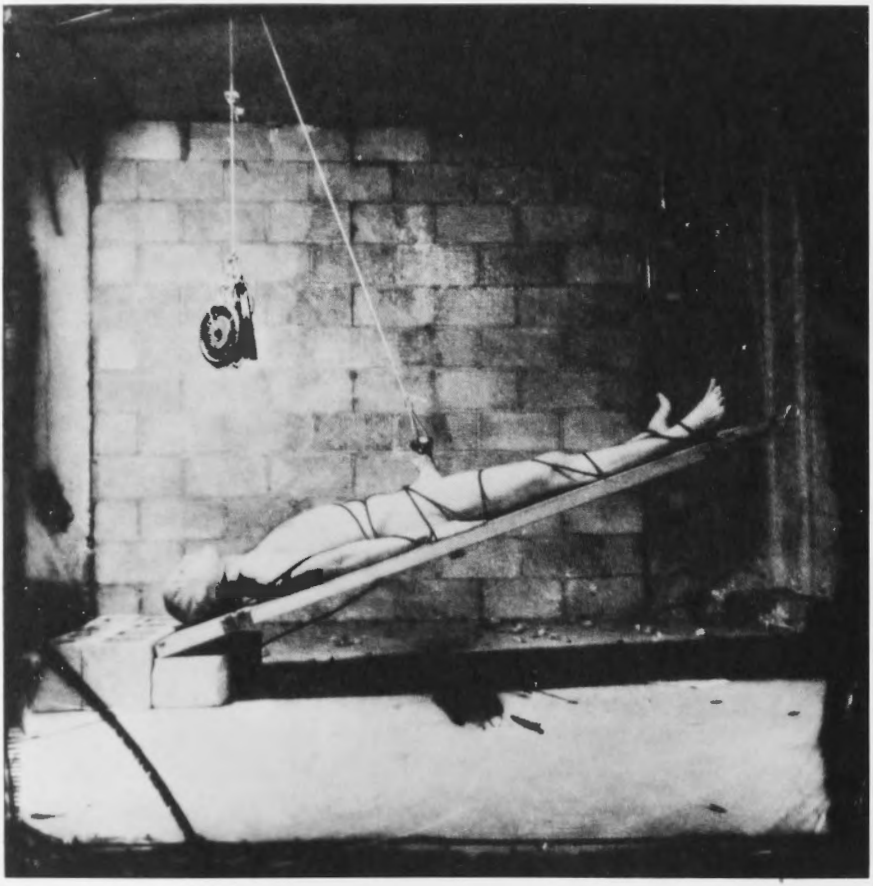
I want to live in an age which sees similar beauty in a flower and in the severed limb of a human being. Therefore, I photograph conditions of being, life and its extension—death. I attempt to find wonder and beauty in the landfill of our histories and ourselves. The subject matter is grotesque, since it is what we, in our darkest moment, have become. We either accept the challenge to discover what the meaning of life, death and afterlife is, or we reject ourselves, becoming merely "human scenery."

Making photographs is a necessity as real as blood, light and love. All that I make is real. I do not collage or superimpose. What I do is to construct an enclosure, a world I fill with people and objects of beauty, of splendor and misery. Often my subjects are masked because being in life is to wear the mask of existence.

Albuquerque, 1991

JOEL-PETER WITKIN
NINE PHOTOGRAPHS

THE KISS
1982

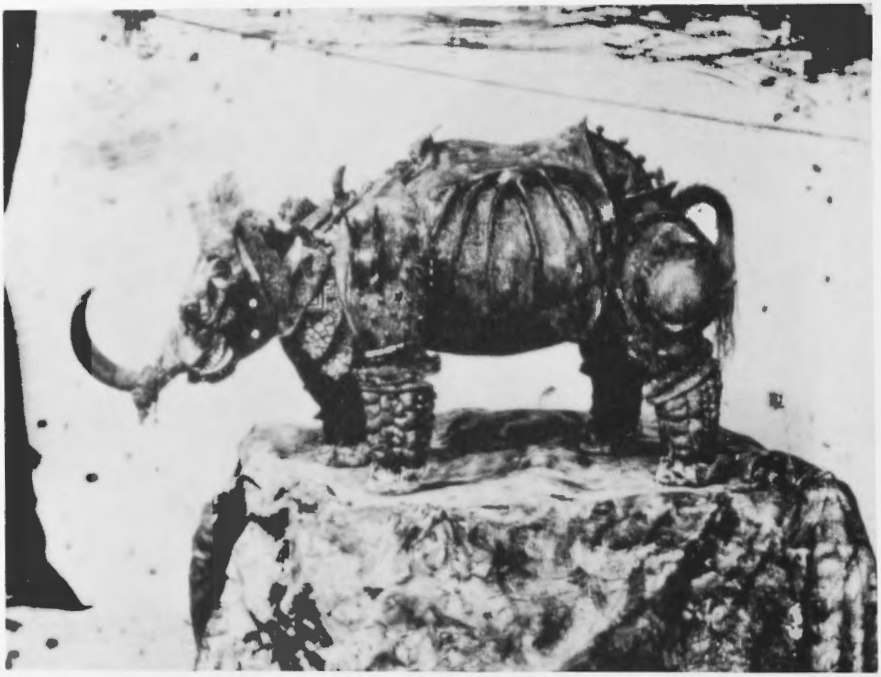


TESTICLE STRETCH WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A CRUSHED FACE

1982

PICASSO EN LOS DISPARATES DE GOYA

1987



LA BÊTE

1987

WOMAN ONCE A BIRD

1990

VANITY

1990

DAPHNE AND APOLLO

1990

MAN WITH DOG

1990

FEAST OF FOOLS

Mexico, 1990

HERBERT LUST
WITKIN VERSUS PHOTOGRAPHY

Despite the self-serving clamor that photography is a fine art the fact is that the pictorial revolution started by cubism has made little imprint on photography, which remains mired in the most draconian chatter. Granted, some exceptions exist, but as a group, photography collectors, dealers, critics and curators are the philistines in American art. This group wills that photography stay hypnotized by the recognizable object/recognizable message. It is inconceivable that current photography could understand that glory in this century, cubism, or its extension, abstract art. While painting collectors have elevated Mondrian, Pollock, Rothko, Newman, and now Stella, Marden and Kelly to the superstar level, photography still babbles about "object" or "meaning." While its best writers like Sontag and Grundberg grumble that photography is some way must rely on tangible reality and, to use the most majestic euphemism, while its collectors remain so "innocent," there is no chance that the current photographic scene will ever revolutionize art or "seeing" as painting has. About as "modern" as the present photography scene dares get is to indulge in an illiterate photo-montage, vegetative expressionism or effete surrealism. In short modern photography is a condom mentality.

However there is one swimming against this self-indulgent muck—Joel-Peter Witkin. He has constructed a world consistent with cubistic formalism and anti-romanticism. His somber credit has been to reconcile the avant-garde with current infantile photographic obsessions by deploying objects that are not objects but rather planes integrated behind or against a painterly screen. However because Witkin uses human anomalies to orchestrate all this and anomalies are still naturalistic referents, his piercing images can still be accepted by the photographic world as their business as usual. Witkin has been acclaimed by the photographic world for the wrong reasons, because this world is so impoverished it cannot understand anything that is intellectual.

I shall not analyze Witkin's expressionism very much—I have very little to add to the great deal that has been written about it. However I should stress that in no way is a Witkin photograph "exploitive." Witkin's human anomalies are Christ images. They are our modern crucified ones, because,

though monsters in appearance, they are in a mental way 100 percent normal. It is they who endure and blossom beyond stone.

A crucifixion implies the demon. Thus there is the demonic and the violent either direct or implied in the greatest Witkin. For example, in the way he juxtaposes animals, both dead and alive, to his human rejects. Richard Lindner is some famous paintings played off the animal against the human, to indicate that we are all animals, with man being the lesser animal. But Witkin's vision goes way beyond Lindner. Lindner in a way is small potatoes compared to Witkin. This is perhaps the first instance in art history where a photographer has beaten a great painter on his own battlefield. However Witkin could never receive credit for such a victory, because it is doubtful if photographic museum curators would even know about Richard Lindner, just as they also feel that once you've seen one Mondrian you've seen them all. However these same museum people feel that every Adams, Weston, Strand, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger is a unique experience. . .but for this writer once you've seen one work by these photographers you've seen them all, while every Mondrian is an adventure.

Even a writer who is "almost" knowledgeable like Grundberg has complained about Witkin's surrealism. This complaint proves this critic's intellectual failure, for it is well known in the fine arts world that surrealism was an extraordinary romantic art movement, whereas Witkin is perhaps the most anti-romantic artist in the 20th century, just as Christ on the cross was anti-romantic. In fact if one had to categorize Witkin, and this writer would not, he would have to be called a formalistic expressionist. But Witkin is more than that.

This writer would rather whisper that a Witkin image is beautiful due to its magical formalism. The finest Witkin images are those organized along synthetic cubist lines where the world foils into vignette-planes that stitch each other through a loitering, mysterious, painterly mist. Sliding mirrors impounded by capillaries that risk and sink at the same time make for the overall breathing that is the best Witkin—*Gods of Earth and Heaven, Portrait of a Dwarf, Un Santo Obscuro, The Prince Imperial, Choice of Outfits for the Agonies of Mary*, and the ones herein reproduced.

Some day the art world will realize that Witkin photographs are not photography, but art drives that by accident were helped along by a camera. Witkin photographs are lagged icons (held along synthetic cubist splittings) that project the most heraldic pictorialism yet seen in this century.

MICHAEL GIZZI
from *NO BOTH*

20 years and one day to the day which I won't affix to the page here as this isn't a letter to anyone but me—long overdue—and because I've initiated so many heartbreaking larks at the starting-gate of truth-telling to "I know you." Only last night because I'm always growing a proboscis I said "Tomorrow I'll begin this new notebook with the words *I surrender,"* like I should have a scarlet brand on my lip in lieu of a moustache which reads "He begins on the morrow" or tattooed to my big toe "He died with his rue on." But even that's a ruse. No wonder I suffer such trapezoidal travel anxiety that to put it wildly I get this visual visceral hallucination that my chest extends six feet straight out like an amphetamine puffed mourning dove. It must have *something* to do with flight—my little fraidy cat flights from change? I always have a sense of camaraderie though when I hear women especially remark quite rightly "Men! O they're terrified of change." And yet if I'm going to make a clean stab at the brisket of it (the truth) I best be careful not to piss-off the mark and traffic only in a bloodbath of my own shirttail shortcomings trailing a Roman Legion, them I know exceedingly well. After all I'm not the Desquamated Professor of Grey Torpor for nothing. But I desire a chair not a pitypot in perpetuity. I want a palpable hit. But I regress. I'm back kneeling on rice kernels in the coldstone circus church of misbehaving bent youth, slurring 3 square Marys, faking a good Act of Conniption flush in front of the Light-a-Candle Concession, a terraced altar of carmine-colored jellyglasses flickering their translucent boo-boos of Jesus. Tongues-of-fire for hire? Drop the geetus in the leadbox and indulge your poor dead Pop with a night on the town in Limbo. A plaque on your house! Sister Tetanus scoring my penance ringside humphing siroccos through the otiose hairs on her wimpled lip. "A beating a day keeps the titters away" peel the Bells of St. Scary. Hang it all, Buster Brown, but we attended a condemned school. No wonder everyone I see points the fingers in their faces at me. Some can't accept a little hotsoup kitchen less it's been divined by their own dowsers, whence the Second Coming of Job. You can imagine where this manic ringworm of road goes. Flatline seems to be the status quo and yet if you're a frantic mountaineer-like Mindanao-diver you pay so dearly being DOAL: dead on

arrival at life, being so bi-polar you either consign yourself to the blasted blame-box or turn your entirely flayed caul of pain on the world's largesse. You know what the guy who ate the school said to me? "I thought it was Prince of Gluttony Day." A telltale sign of instability responsible for many memorable events. Why can't one have fun in his/her own home? But in our misty roses we forget.

Take a letter, Sister McCree. Dear Bushwhack St. Tacky of Bombazine: I'm well aware I haven't yet surrendered but I can't get my eye-fix inners off those severed breasts of Catherine on a platter, erect. How can you expect anyone to surrender to a subsect inquisition of *humilitas* such as you expect? Life is a queer little man to quote Barry Fitzgerald but I'm not sure I want to bunk with him. The eyes of knickers are upon us (to be sung). It is the corning of the reign of ham. Even the old fogies of Continuing Ed slip back into their saddle shoes after a barrenness session of bairn, the said sad unzipped blindstiff bifurcating the curb as Jimmy said "once he was a little boy" and his folks provided for him. Let it be spit in the sod's soiled neck with throat-chimes: I like me and share my contact gardenhose of glee and no Richelieu of hypocrisy can stanch it.

Christ clocked at a buck-ten on I–91. Fifteen pounds of pancake minkup. A contact bum of valorous stick-to-it-iveness sad as that nightie of dishwater undoing itself. Let's grow up and go to sleep like seagulls saying kaddish over a lost harpoon. Wait a minute! wasn't I going somewhere? Although we speak a lost speech which ain't quite (is it?) true and dive into the blind plural pastime like coins on Oedipus-eyes or Mister Sainted Mother Tough Tomato deaf as a hundred years, how is it knowledge gets

lost and the meaning clear? What a fella needs is mother-wit and a horsehair—wilts a boy faster than lettuce leaf dropped on a doorstep at midday. Another drubbing from his own monkey's uncle. Daylights phrase our staggering stars. The sorrow of wild oats is to sodomize flies? Pull out the rug from under your road—a pothole promiscuous moon. I smell something locked-up acappella saboteur. 11:00 to 3:00 is four hours and I think I slept for three which is a record for undisturbed me. I knew if I didn't slow down I'd be breaking bread on my father's knee in the bleep hereafter, blue as the sky left in the dark in a blind rage chilling a red-faced white. How come the will takes over when the spirit says uncle? like those I'll-bend-your-wrists-back-if-you-don't-bend-mine games I used to play with Pop, pasting uppers on our hearts.

Ripley's believe-it-or-not but I just purchased my first rack of rubbers at the age of 43 brought'em home and plopped'em in my top drawer sock salter which I keep opening so's to peek in and see my father there in safety in *my* bedroom as I never was snooping about in his. But condoms father nothing good or bad—sorry Sister Martyr la Favorita. The last time (one of them) together at the Audubon Sistine Bird Sanctuary arguing as usual but having fun as though we'd straddle that high tension wire forever, neither of us giving in that was our definition of love and it was a good one because there's only the *one* life which we both knew but which most people fashimmeled forget. He was standing in a drizzle in front of the talking parrot toucan what-do-you-call-it minah bird cage, a nosehair stark sticking out in the air that only grey can illumine and I so athletic-like stepped up as if to slug a homerun which I'd done so many times before and which he'd refused to come see me do due to the high tension wire and with one swift swiping mongoose move I d'Artagnaned that hair right out of his nose. It was a tender moment especially for him as his eyes watered from pluck-pain and I knew in that photo-finishing moment I'd beat him by a hair which is also why his eyes watered with that love only a father can have for a son who's finally surpassed him. And then the lecture scientific of course about the dangers of causing an aneurysm to the brain due to such daring pluck—a Scientific American death in front of a birdhut? I could fill a shoebox with nosehairs of foiling death-defying self-destructive feints at

reunion. Between thumb and forefinger I tweeze a nosehair and whisper "hang on, maybe this time I'm comin', Pop!"

Determined to say nothing today that isn't absolutely. Determined to see sunup horizon. Determined to see these tongues of fleur-de-lis fiery floaters herded into an eyesock. Determined to get that brandnew custom hilt heartbeat of sailcloth. Determined to hear it purr like the one leaf maple lone hung-on red through winter quorums on which is being recorded now the demo of Spring's first birdsong. Determined to level these seven hills useless as nipples on a man's behind. Determined to marlinspike that grass skirt stub in a flask scribing all ivory. Determined to know that head of Vallejo. Determined to offend everyone I know and have them thank me. Aren't I the wild eagle's birdtongue waxing the roof of his house widdershins? Determined to write for every hamstrung son of woman who ever tipped his visor-cap from a truck-cab at me. Determined as St. George to slay that autocrat who molts exponentially his oily scales like some televised Southwestern beltbuckle of turquoise. Determined to shatter back like a fly's eyeview the strabismic points of a 24–sided glance times what? to be multiplied infinitely dropping back into a punt-receiving mirror? a winding sheet reading itself backwards into fate?

A few times in our lives we live like cats. The child in us loves the applause. Watching is nothing. Angels are people who never blinked. I see them sniffing. One day you'll sit in the sun and be incinerated like a saltation. Sometimes terrible things happen quite naturally. I get up in the morning and there's my skin in the bed. It got my hand, can you beat that! then a wasp stung out my eye. Makes my hungry fist seem like the angel of mercy's

compote. My skin got all shiny like a mirror, seas of boiled fish, ink like you've never seen, my sweat in a bottle dripping gasoline. Pray that you're young. Innocence can be Hell. An echo of an utterance inwardly, secretly accompanies an "other." A quality of bondage.

Get your ass outta my soul you pastina-brained organdy wraith-maker. You're the worm that appled my tenement steps. Who was it Piero della Francesca'd your cinderblocks of misperspective? You gonna blame that on cousin Ninganing too? How could such beauty align itself with a drainpipe and stay there snaked? Your dress like your home cantilevered in a prom date photo pic 1941, sixteen years before your first Olds Italiano statement of status quo arriviste nouveau leech creeping assimilation. You dis-mug me. I wanna barf on the beauty that was the foliage surrounding you in that '41 photo pic, coppiced now like you and your attitude all because I hate what they done to you and you let them do shutting me down like some *Cinecitta ragazzi* who died before he was born, my sick socked soul outworn bumming that Appian Way of all kids who want a break from Mama not just spaghetti. Go back and capture that dress (that loner) that handmedown sistergown and bathe in it and remember your son before you were born.

I almost wish this spud were in your gut
among the driest of the century
and then at the very top of the image
speed at night

We hope he's in a better place
than eyebrows from a mouse's hide
picking out his crystal eye
a tick on which to sup

Few things as devastating
as a dryspell
stationary over terrain
the graphic lifting air up of a slope

Game little Gladys with her jumprope
Vibology with vexation
On automatic self *sieg heil*

The wives in my mind
The bird on my finger throwing voices
You draw the blanks

Wad some power cubes
See as others see
Pick-up your eyes

Eureka feels like home
Hello, Darling!
You sure is a sharpie

Beautifying the be

I went about on little ant-knees, a beetle shining back saying "Step on me" and now I'm beating myself with a liquid. Reading the world it appears everyone thinks they have an ear, but "you no got *ear*" until you find the lost ear of Van Gogh buried rotten like some queer cob of corn under earth in yellow Provence. Fast ills—the autistic slur of quiz kids. So language is a plot to make us think we're gods and so destroy us. Who said it's raining fish to the trees? My heart is so all fired-up it's beating on the other side now. That level on which poetry is a compensation for a lack of conversation between any two of which we make much, like those guys who could go to the edge but go back inside to do some ice fishing instead. Closer I ever got to brothers though, almost like my nose. The capguns of my enormous liberty, Mayakovsky in the backpocket of my headfirst. Because I knew you couldn't have a coffee without a smoke I saved this nail. Met an old dovetail in the sleet today. A Sycorax of showtunes, I bite a War Between the States bullet. There are rats running up and down inside my legs. The seats of all my pants shiny like a nursery rhyme. The citizeneer down on his luck. And who invented the screw? I'd like to know all about it backwards. By George, isn't that bigtop on pickup sticks? O you of Little Teeth, your cough which resembles the missing pounds of an old man.

With obscure language arrives the visitor of the flame. A barter of images abstract as life and death caresses the patriot of legend complete with his invisible humility. Nostalgia is an impossible language attached to a dream casual as dirt. Visions caress the ramp called an error of Corinthians. Starlight another ad for the sea. On the high seas (2 of them Hebrew) the leaves move to reflect a monstrous endowment. A leaf in the magical plenitude of a nap speckles its branches. Words are not a poem but a mirror that suggests. I write to mean words are not the poem. Sentimental minerals hang descendent, on the prowl. A closed leaf preambles its coroner. This respiration encores the pure sense of writing. The address of the invisible leaf is of the future leaf. The pensive memory of furious mettle and the tendons of a bird with two bills brilliant in the disposal my life reflects as a crystal shines on a diamond in feverish pain. And the smoking dogs in their venting degrees. Now I enter the sea the perpetual semblance of a quiet man smoking his fingers in an English pavilion. A dead guide we can

chat with. The air of my heart arranging a race of tense. Truth may never enter the mind of what originally thought it. What breathes "other" becomes a part that didn't comprehend. Somehow the door missed what was going on. The throwaway dream remembers what it's used. A circle of aberration that makes a wind turn to stone.

for Jean Frémon

HUGH SEIDMAN
FOUR POEMS

MY LITTLE PARENTS

So pure. So far
From the wars.

They stare at what
In the photo?

So pale, so far
From the fires.

So pure, so lucid
In the silver wind.

Their faces lit
With the end of war.

ONE THREATENED

One threatened, threatens all, said the petition.

The orphaned, child-soldier; the raped, butchered girl.
The cliché that the universe dilates toward blood.

That is, whatever one conjures.

On Fifth Avenue the salesman suggested grey or navy.

The wools and blends, solids, pinstripes,
Single-breasted, double-breasted, vented and unvented

Martyrish husks.

BALL GAME

Priest/courtiers' rubber, bone-crunch hard ball
stroked by a sort of atlatl at a vertical
stone ring 23 feet up.

Some think the impaled lost:
skulls on poles as at Tenochtitlan.
Others: that beheaded winners won next-world glory.

Now, many glyphs deciphered:
State praised, captives skinned
(extracted nails and heart, severed lips).

But also, of course, others exhort:
note flower-carved facades; deep myth;
iridescent, green and crimson quetzal dance feathers.

CHILD

25 years ago the skeletal Biafran wall photo of witness.
Now its double wails on the Relief Fund mail flier.

A whole well costs only four dollars. Water poured to a child's
cup.

Nothing so near as how near one must move toward action.
Toward the uses of a person not for whatever purpose but only
for its
personhood.

ED SANDERS
MELVILLE'S FATHER

1.

"Reputation is far more valuable
than fame or riches"
—Allan Melvill

He had a seeking to be stainless

"My children," he wrote
"I trust will inherit an honest name
and keep pace with improvements"

O Name!

O Spotless Clairvoyancy!
Thing of Pure Blood!

O Unsullied Formula
in Time's Torrent!

O spotless
unblemished rivet in
the metal of infinity!

O Stainlessness!

2.

New York in 1818

The impoverished
after the Napoleonic
wars

packed N.Y.C.

The creeks were paved over,
the farmland taken,

and the poor peoples' grave blocks
known from the Bible
as potter's fields
became parks
the only spots the developers
would leave behind
as open space

3.

Allan and Maria Gansevoort Melvill,
two spotless names, she of the
purse-proud Gansevoorts
and he of the war hero Melvills
married and bore 8 children.

In 1818
when he was 36
Allan Melvill went to France
to organize a wholesale business
in "French goods,"

When he returned
Maria became pregnant
with the future author of

"Bartleby the Scrivener,"
who was born on August 1, '19.

4.

Allan Melvill opened his business
on Pearl Street
near the South Street seaport
and supervised the
crates at the docks
of goods from the schooners
for the rich and proper:
lavender, ribbons, scarves, handkerchiefs,
selvages (ornamental fringe or ribbon sewn on borders
to prevent unraveling), corsets, bonnets, silk gloves,
fine-plaited wheat straw hats,
Spitafield silk and the fancy cloth
known as white tapaze.

O French goods!
from the home of Revolution
the rage of thought!
the hint of skin!

O triumph of style
that temporary array
in the torrent, that
meringue above the stratum, where
scents and lace and pheromones commingle
just out of reach of the waves
that slam by Plymouth Rock.

5.

The Crash of '26

For eight years it was Triumph!
The ledgers tell the tale,
even though being a middleman
is that most vulnerable
of roles

But around 1826
came one of those
"incomprehensible economic collapses"
those periodic poor-kills
where they break off city tree limbs
for fire wood
so that the '30s of the 19th
were like the '30s of the 20th,

and French goods were just the
sort of thing
not to be bought
during poor-kill.

The Melvills were not prepared
to be swept up in such
a democratic phenomenon
so, in 1828 they moved with their eight children
and two servants
to a spiffy 2–storey house at 675 Broadway
near Bleecker (don't bother
to try to find it—it's now a block-
sized modern brick apartment)

6.

A Slow Slide

There's nothing like a
slow slide
into failure

You think
sometimes
it's success

but really, it's
like when
a little commuter
plane
comes down
in layers
in a bucking wind,

up, down, down, up
down, buck

so that failure
feignedly fastens.

7.

For the penniless man
is the worst kind of criminal
Beyond both pity and pardon
—Brecht, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*

Thou lackest money?
You scum
You are really scum
You are homeless?

You want it that way!
You can't pay?
You are the scum of failure
The scum of scum!
Lower your immune system,
scum
Work around the clock,
scum
Raise your metabolism
scum
Burn it! Allan
Shake it! Allan
Make death of it! Allan
Fall with it! Allan

Shame shame
shame & blame
never the same
stain on the name

8.

They probably kept it hidden
from Herman and the seven, for

children never want to hear
their parents are out of money

With rich relatives
it never got down to

recycled clothing under the
Christmas tree

but in those days o' eco-Dickens
there was no Chapter 11

and you could
go to jail

if you fled
your debts

so when in 1830 Allan Melvill went bankrupt
and they fled their two stories
on Broadway near Bleecker,

there was the click
of phantom handcuffs
in the mist

9.

They moved back to Albany
where the cold winter wind
from the narrow Hudson
was a poor-kill

They tried to keep the horror
hidden from haughty relatives, but he had
sunk so low as to
clerk in a fur store.

Ahh the shame of it!
Face-burning! Exquisite!
To clerk in a store!

10.

Advice to the middle aged
with penury's prize

Save your immune system
Stay calm
Stay energized
Stay cunning, focussed
Reach out

Don't blame yourself
It's the system's fault
Be prepared to be sneered at
like a hungry rat
a run-down cat
or bat scat

and know that it's
the fault of
the same
cruel system
formed on the
edge of the
glaciers
in the
Pleistocene
& Holocene

11.

He was almost 50
when the lungs under stress
rasp, "can't do it, can't do it"
so he tapped into his
life force.

In April o' '31
Allan confessed poverty to his father

In August o' '31
he went to Boston
to ask him (inspector
of the Custom House)
for moolah

& then in October a loan from
bro'-in-law Peter Gansevoort
(head of the State Bank of Albany)

for 2K to take over
a bankrupt retail fur and cap store
plus a manufacturing plant
at 364 South Market Street
(now Broadway) in Albany.

There was plenty of fur
and hides from
the hemlock bark tanneries
in the Caskills.

Allan went to New York City
in late November o' '31
and picked up additional credit—

It was going to be success!
Money! The Return of Stainlessness!

Servants again! And the children to be
able "to keep pace with improvements."

12.

The steamboat Constellation
left the New York docks
on an icy December day in 1831
bound for Albany

He had the money
He had the credit
and contentedly watched the
crusts of ice in the Hudson

eager to get home to make
those beaver hats!
Make some money before Christmas!
Money!

till, 60 miles upstream at Poughkeepsie
the steamer couldn't cut
through the ice.

They pulled to dock
and there were no covered
coaches available
to scoot up to Albany

A Holocene ice storm
cares not about a name
so he went in a one-horse open wagon

through bouncy ruts of icy snow
trying to stay on the road

Got to get back to Albany!
Not a second to tarry!
Come on Immune System! Come on Metabolism!

He lost his scarf, and
his coat was warm enough
to wheel and deal in NYC
but not enough for an
arctic trail.

The driver
gave him a quilt
but his lower back froze up

He coughed
His temperature rose
Good! More energy!

Here mate, have a shot
of hooch
home made

A cold piece of baked rabbit
to eat

while they fixed the wagon's frame.

Temperature zero.
His lungs felt like they were
full of water.

Thirty miles to Rhinebeck,
then in another wagon to
Hudson—twenty miles

Finally, in a covered sleigh to Greenbush
at sunset after
three hypothermic days

the sleigh let him out.

He walked across the Hudson,
narrow at Albany
the temperature minus 2 Fahrenheit
in a poor-kill wind
and went right to his store
just off the river
without going home.

13.

Mercury

Melvill was going to "reorganize"
the fur factory—
on South Market Street
so I ponder whether
he experimented in beaver felt hats.

They rubbed the felting furs with mercury
mixed with acid

then the hairs were cut from the hide
and put into a pile
which was then
vibrated with a 7-foot bow to shake
and mold it into interwoven felt—

The trembling bow
would spew mists of quicksilver
into the hard-breathing
lungs of the felter

Mercury is extremely nephrotoxic,
causes cellular damage,
it may lead to circulatory collapse
& oliguria, or lack of urine

And those poisoned
by the feltmaker's disease
could have used dialysis machines
to cleanse their kidneys.

Mercury inactivates
a wide variety of enzymes
and aerosolic exposure to it
produces chills, fever, coughs, chest pains,
hemoptysis (blood-spit), insomnia, nervousness,
impaired judgement, propensity to freak out,
fatigue, loss of sex drive, depression, abdominal
cramps, et al.

It may
have pushed
him o'er th'
Immune
System
Edge

For Allan Melvill
evinced some of the symptoms
of mercury poisoning

may literally have gone
Mad as a Hatter
striding around his factory

in the neurotoxic wafts
which are absorbed by the alveoli
and spread to the brain.

In any case
for a month he slaved
consumed with mania and overwork,
his metabolism
in toxic overdrive
till January 7, 1832

he went bonkers,
took to bed,
for 21 days
with pneumonia, then delirium, then thanatos.

Herman was 13.

14.

Buy Cheap Sell Dear

No one
no group
lives long enough
to structure
a system
to ease the pain
of living.

And you can say, well, Sanders,
your analysis
strays from the nature
of the species

and tragedy requires
the order that is

no rest for the best

but the cruelty of the system
& maybe a little mercury poisoning
killed Herman Melville's father
early.

CHARLES OLSON & FRANCES BOLDEREFF

WHO WILL BRING IT UP, MY LUTE? THE FIRST LETTERS OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

(Edited by Ralph Maud and Sharon Thesen)

In November of 1947, Frances Boldereff, "standing longingly in front of the Melville shelves" of a bookstore, lighted upon *Call Me Ishmael.* The next day she wrote to its author, Charles Olson, in gratitude for "betraying" himself "as one of the ones we so urgently need." Thus began a correspondence that lasted until Olson's death in 1970.

By the summer of 1950, the exchange had accelerated to daily and sometimes twice-daily missives. In viewing these letters in terms of Olson's development as a poet, we cannot ignore Boldereff's vital contribution. The letters indicate how much of his verse at this time came out of wanting to say things to her. The following selection, comprising the first thirty letters between them, reaches as far as Olson's poem "La Chute," inspired when Boldereff sent him an article on the Gilgamesh epic by Samuel Kramer.

The following pages also include two early examples persuasive of Boldereff's talent: the juxtapositions that comprise *A Primer of Morals for Medea,* an autobiographical response to sculptures of Michelangelo; and a notebook written in 1936 when Boldereff was 31. This notebook was her answer to Otto Weinenger's misogynistic *Sex and Character.* That she entrusted such an intimate document to Olson at this early stage of their relationship (they hadn't yet met) shows the degree to which Boldereff was eager for the companionship Olson's presence in the world brought to her.

Their influence upon one another persisted despite periods of anguish, confusion, and desperation, and through the various durations of marriages to others. Frances Boldereff and Charles Olson served each other well, as human beings at their best can sometimes do.

Woodward to New York c/o Reynal & Hitchcock
22 November 1947

BOOK DESIGN

Frances Boldereff

Woodward, Penna.

November 22

Dear Mr. Olson—

Yesterday, standing longingly in front of the Melville shelves, I found your *Call me Ishmael.*[1] Every lover of Melville must feel deep gratitude towards you—for the understanding

for the clear and so intensely personal style of the language
for the perfect taste in the acknowledgments
for the hints about us, now
and in general for betraying yourself as one of the ones we so urgently need.

A perfect book which I Intend to see that all the people I know who can read receive a copy of. (I'm not saying it's so many.)

In very great gratitude,

Frances Boldereff

Sacramento to Woodward
29 December 1947

Sacramento, California
December 29, 1947

My dear Frances Boldereff—

It is generous of you.

I am very curious to know what yr own work is—BOOK DESIGN.

You'd have had my pleasure in your letter earlier—but for the forwarding involved. I am out here running out the lines of search which a new book—on archetype creatures of our past—pushes me along on. It's a wretched, thin stage of the method: journals, maps, letters.[2]

You might find some interest in one of the tarot pieces in December Harper's Bazaar.[3]

You see what you've done.

Thanks,

Charles Olson

Permanent address:
217 Randolph Place NE
Washington 2, D.C.

Woodward to Washington
[early January 1948]

Whenever I ride on a train, which is fairly seldom these days and someone asks me "What do you do"—I know beforehand I am wasting my breath—"I am a typographic designer." Oh!

And the "Oh" is always followed by the silence of a complete lack of reciprocity. Same as when I used to answer "A curator of art at the University of Iowa"—

I know, Charles Olson—that you ***know*** what I do—only—how do I do it in Woodward—and live? Harry Sternberg, the etcher, said, "And Motz, what kind of plague do they have in Woodward, that you pay $10 rent?"—Funny, but it's true.

Only free lance at this distance from NYC proved difficult so I commute 32 miles to State College where I have charge of the printing. No one but a New Yorker would think that was close, but I love all the minutes I waste riding back and forth—the only ones that are absolutely mine.

I shall most surely look up the Harper's.

I wrote to Norman Foerster at Chapel Hill—about you and I have been making myself fairly obnoxious to a number of other people all of whom I could knock over because they act as though someone tells them about a book like that often—whereas I consider it in a group of maybe three in twenty-five years.

Once I said to Philip Guston that people are always wanting to know details about artists, musicians—and God! all the details are so *given* in their work—sometimes the spirit coming through so naked and uncovered that one walks very quietly for fear of intruding.

In a way I believe I have never seen—you kept yourself out and yet are so *in* your book.

I cannot pretend I do not know you.

And I am so damned grateful you've no idea.

I am surrounded in the daytime by the bourgeoisie complete in the only German word I know—*ohne.*[4]

Frances Boldereff

Woodward to Washington
[January 1948]

State College.

Mr Olson—

In a recent story of Vladimir Nabokov's in *Directions* he said he was at times in a quiet way fairly fond of his inefficiency—that could be my statement too. But when it keeps me from finding something I really need—a *In Praise of the Fool* then I grow furious—imagine anyone getting so excited as to read quite plainly Harper's Bazaar and then to tear off in the completely wrong direction asking for a Harper's! I like your writing because I cannot read every word—I was so surprised to find a poem—some day you can say what the word is—I liked *your* "is" too, in the letter.

I would wear the poem around my neck to make a speech for me—but it wouldn't help because I don't know anyone here who could read it—Wonderful to have a speech made *for* you—especially when your heart is burning with fury.

In Woodward, a remote village once belonging to my grand papa—they have several expressions I have not heard elsewhere—they always ask—"Shall I go with?" leaving the pronoun unsaid.

The poem "goes with" so terrifically—hard for me to believe you are living anywhere within the U.S. borders. All the elegant people are dead and the other kind alive or dead I wouldn't know. Elegant carries its dictionary meaning. And you aren't and that's what I keep saying to myself can not be true.

Frances Boldereff

I know you know some—I spoke only for myself.

Washington to Woodward (postcard)
11 May 1948 (postmark)

Dear Frances Boldereff:

Nonsense.[5] Truth is, was in California longer than expected. And, with return here, had spurt of work in all directions: prose, play, verse. (Psychotic!)

Still running, like herring in spring.

(Back on Dante yesterday myself: de vulgare eloquentia.[6] As of what is Am. vulgare: the present oppose to Whitman and son Pound. The oppose, of course, is continuum. But what?

You are right, and they are wrong, on "Fool" (which is on Black Sun Press, Paris, with 4 better ones, now, and is called THE GREEN MAN.[7] Better?)

Cordially,
Olson

P.S. I shall be curious to have your judgment on type of "y & x." Proofs came this week—& it looks to my untrained eye as perfect type: like revolutionary broadside.

Woodward to Washington
[mid June 1948]

I have written something like thirty-five inscriptions[8] and cast them all aside—the final one is—

For Olson—with whom I should love to get drunk.

the Motz

When will it be possible to see any of the other things you have been working on?

Washington to Woodward (postcard)
23 June 1948 (postmark 25 June 1948)

June 23 xlviii

Thank you for the delightful design—and invitation. Fact is, the fishing is still good. I have finished one dance-play and am off into another,[9] and it very much looks like I'll tolerate this Afric place/

y & x has also wilted with the summer and I reckon it'll be fall before any more is done on it. It appears there's no press other than newspaper to take the 54" sheet the design involves, and that it must be spliced. Which may be just as well. For the middle hinge was a weak point in the design and Bayler, Union Square, sez, it's like a bone, better after broken.

My greetings to you

Olson

A crowd in a forest of the city make
attention turned as heads which hear demand
the green republic now renewed.[10]

Woodward to Washington
26 June 1948 (postmark)

Saturday

Olson my friend—

I take *off* my hat—I have been wondering how a person like you could cope with an invitation like mine—never saw my face—never had a letter which was me—and yet a polite person—I decided several times to help you out—but an imp prevented me.

I finished several days ago, *Walden*—am so grateful I never read Thoreau before because this was exactly the right week of my life to read it—he tells how the conversations in the winter nights demanded room—a whole roomful of space between himself and his guest and as I read I thought—"Olson doesn't know this is why and I am not going to explain—that is it—he is a man with whom you can have a conversation which requires a whole big roomful of space between the speakers—I am not going to tell him that I am above the bourgeois explanation—that in a sense the invitation was not an invitation—it was a recognition—and I disdain to change its form because God has placed me in the female sex. In my house he can be free—and I will hear him"—and it seemed to me very proper in a deep sense that I had expected so much comprehension from you, of unknowns, and felt so sure because your book proves so amply how wide is your interior.

The month has been marvelous—a Hungarian friend left of a few days ago after spending several weeks and they were a marvelous two weeks—next year I plan to go to Italy with her if I can save the money—she knows it so intimately and I not at all.

I have magnificent plans of work for the coming six months—I am so sure that the circle of our lives will bring us face to face some day (sounds like a Sunday school class but you know the important thing is that you are alive in my place and time).—I laugh as I write this—because God knows you could never have a guarantee that I am what I am—it is very good to me that you are full and flowing—I am wondering how can you say "the green republic now renewed"—oh! Olson please say if you mean that—I am sure the whole shell has to be sloughed off and of men alive I know maybe of four.

When you get time write me a letter—no matter how many months it is and tell me about America[11]—tell me how it is for you—for I expect nothing and then your book comes along and upsets my calculations—and so I do not know what she has in her bosom.

Frances M.B.

State College to Washington
1 December 1948 (postmark)

Olson—

I believe it will please your soul as it has surely pleased mine that the enclosed note[12] was sent off before I had gotten home to Woodward and received your envelope.[13] I will write at length when your book comes—in the meantime I wish you to know that in my opinion your poem *The K* is definitely the greatest poem which has been written in any country in this century (excluding the drama of Garcia Lorca, of course)—I am agin modern poetry in general on account it has all gone up into the head—

If I could write poetry your poem would have come out of me as an *exact* statement of my position as of December, 1948.

I am publishing a book of my own and will, and have been planning to, send you a copy as soon as I receive them—4 to 6 weeks.[14]

With love for you for what you do—

FB

Washington to Woodward (postcard)
2 December 1948 (postmark 3 December 1948)

dec 2

FB:

I am looking into JERUSALEM for the 1st time & find this wondrous line:[15]

The Male is a Furnace of beryll; the Female is a golden Loom.

Thank You. "of great hardness, occurring in hexagonal prisms, commonly green or bluish green"

No. My Man comes out of tarot card numero zero by way of babylonians tzigane italian-magi (short for farmers) cagli & olson. "Druids", I'm afraid WB wld call 'em! Big & black and covered with hair! Beautiful!

Yr book I'll lk fr'd to

0 numero 0

State College to Washington
8 January 1949

January 8.

Olson—

What happened the first time I read *Trinacria*[16] I do not know—at any rate I most surely was somewhere else—for on a second reading it suddenly opened for me and I think it is magnificent. I can not see that you know less than the bravest and best—my particular trio—Rimbaud, Joyce and Blake—if you live with the verve, depth of understanding and courage you show in your writing—American is a blessed land indeed. ("There is a sword"—how right oh yes. It occurs to me that Blake has directly willed his to you.)

There are several things in the other poems I do not understand—and the title?—were you in Italy and Sicily recently—the only connection I could figure for the Christmas poem[17] was Duccio—so masterfully a Christian painter—I received it precisely Christmas morning and considered it a very fine present.

I am so glad to touch at this moment, via the U.S. mails, a human who has nothing to do with my private life—I am trying to prepare a show of my stuff—my adorable daughter suddenly came down with the measles the morning after her birthday party at which she achieved the pride of six—you would much approve—silken and white and black—I am trying, after being very polite, detached and unhurried, to gouge my book—complete—by February first out of a printer who has not yet submitted a color proof!

Olson—in a way not meant to be intrusive and making no comment on whomsoever's feet are parked on top of your best recordings—I consider you alive on the earth today as my closest of kin.

Frances was Motz
had been Boldereff
please use Motz—
inside and out

State College to Washington
[mid-January 1949]

Every night the faces of William Blake and James Joyce lean out of heaven and repeat to me the stupid sentence I wrote to you "If your life is lived"—the punishment is that I have to look at them. And I think—"What if Olson were to send that sentence back to me when he receives my book!"

It is not the first time I have wanted to bite my arm off at the shoulder—

At any rate I found a copy of Blake's plates for *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and I simply could not believe my eyes—I had not read it before

and when you receive a copy of my book you will see why I consider his poem my personal property.

In the morning I walk along the street saying over to myself the first two stanzas beginning "Upon a Moebus strip"—[18]

The music sings itself—and it reconciles me as only Michelangelo and Beethoven have—I keep saying "Thank you God"—

I think your poems are the purest, hardest most perfect diamonds that any poet has written since Villon—they have the same kind of dispelling surface and they are so hard one can use them for cutting any rock that gets in one's way.

"Itself a leopard"

Olson, I am so pleased it has taken me so long to be able to *read* your poems—if a man distils the conquest of years into such concentrated lines the reader definitely should be admitted only by his own purchased ticket.

I thank you and I hope when you receive in two weeks my book that you will feel the same.

The cover had a very slight error and has to be reprinted—the inside is not perfect but I am refraining from asking the printer to do it again as probably no one will feel as badly about it as I do.

Frances Boldereff

It is driving me crazy to wait.

State College to Washington
20 January 1949 (postmark)

Just came back from New York where I showed your poems to several discriminating persons—the one whose opinion I value most said, about *Trinacria*

"It's the most aristocratic thing I've ever seen."

The comment in my other note was not meant to imply that your writing was not your life—as it so obviously most surely is—the comment was only in brief passing to remember Melville—whose years alone cause a burning fierce pain.

I am stumbling all over with new names—

F.B.

State College to Washington
25 January 1949 (postmark)

I gave your poems to a young Englishman who has just turned up here—he was very grateful—last night I read Wallace Fowlie *Clowns and Angels*—I do not know, but something makes me furious
at this great Catholic procession—the womb path—back to warmth, authority—no—

Blake Underground,[19] so very.

I am shouting all of them—the Moebus strip—each of them to myself—

And I am saying—

"Where and how did we get this?"—oh Olson! What a terrific aristocrat you are.

Apropos of

"So came to apogee and earned and wore himself as amulet."[20]

the only one I know who can repeat those lines or at least is looking forward to being able to—

said—

"What do I care if he is my brother? What good is that to me?" And that is the fierce modern truth—to each man his own single honor, unmatched, attained and looked at coldly.

Woodward to Washington
[late February 1949]

Dear Charles Olson—

All of us have hundreds of levels—you of all of us would know that best and so you would understand the swift passage from sorrow to levity.

Tonight alone in my house (I have just said goodbye to a guest whom I have not seen since college—nor heard from, never intimate and it was a perfect thing, the most *effort*less absolute harmony I have ever experienced) I am reading about Blake and very suddenly your poem starts to say itself aloud—again and then once more and oh! Olson—Meister Eckhardt put in his appearance and said "Can't you see how perfect and beautiful a connect is now existent? Why would you press to something which can never be perfect?" And I understand and I want you to know there is no voice quiet enough for me to say how much I thank you.

For these brief hours I have been able as Boehme so long ago taught me "Desire God."

For some time past I have said "the only prayer possible is 'Hallelujah.'" Lovely Ninette said out of her French Catholicism—"But of course you pray—you are a prayer." And in my sense, so I am, tonight.

A PRIMER OF MORALS FOR MEDEA[21]

(Russian Classic Non-Fiction Library)

TO MICHELANGELO

who has seen deeper and has
stated with a more rigorous candor
than any artist who has lived,
woman's knowledge
of life

1 *The greatest good which can be done to any being, greater than any end to which it can be created, is to make it free.*
The Journals of Soren Kierkegaard. 616.

2 You are a slave, Medea.

3 That which enslaves you was not created by man.

4 Nature enslaves you.

5 Nature is therefore your enemy.

6 Man discovered this for himself thousands of years ago, but you, Medea, are only discovering it now.

7 This places upon you a burden.

8 You, Medea, can not ignore nature—you will get your nose broken if you try.

9 Do you remember the fable about the water wearing away the stone?

10 The water is a new kind of vision.

11 The vision is not a man vision: it is not a Blake vision—it is a vehement desire without form.

12 You can not escape nature, therefore all known methods of combat are ruled out as useless. You can do as she asks. During the years when you are paying her hundred-share your vision must be so vehement as to burn without fuel—you will have no fuel to give. All of your fuel

will be thrust into a Rimbaudian hell where with the greatest will you will seek to destroy yourself.

13 During these years the net of your vision will drag illness, despair, loss of identity, revilement, torture.

14 You will not sleep, nor let sleep.

15 No man will put out his hand to you because the form of what you are doing will be your own and invisible.

16 All traps which nature has placed at your disposal for the enslavement of man you will come to despise as the enemies of your being.

17 You can not exist if you plot.

18 All plotting is of the animal world and is to be discarded.

19 When the demons depart, having learned that your self-torture is greater than any of their devising, you will be left standing with either foot straddled across a bottomless pit—you will have warning that the line of its curve may change at any moment—demanding your readiness to jump, to change the foothold at any second.

20 And then one day it will be whispered to you—"Now you are free."

21 That will not be the end, Medea. That will be the beginning.

22 Then Medea you must journey into the world—a mother—some Time in fact, always in deed.

23 You will then, Medea, have become a mother who spurns security for herself and for her offspring. You will have learned, Medea, that security is a mirage, that man rightfully has despised you because you have never once up to now forsaken it.

24 You will give to each who needs—without regard to his beauty, power, or achievement—whomsoever God places before you—devotion—generosity—warmth—passion and above all—joyicity.

25 You will give, as you have always given, but with this difference—not to possess, but to let go free.

26 Then thou wilt perceive, Medea, that God has placed over thy shoulders a most able cloak.

27 And while that cloak will cover thee, thou wilt come to understand that thy relation to the moon is an allegory of thy indirect relation to all things. For thee will everything take place but thy name will be everywhere unknown except to him alone in whose heart it burns. The direct tasks belong to a man. Thine are the indirect.

28 For what reason shalt thou thus belabor thy soul? In steadfast, bitter aridity?

29 That thou mayst walk the earth an adult.

30 *And in like manner, many things have heretofore been despised, because they have not been put to the proper use.*

Loosely quoted from New Essays
Concerning Human Understanding
Leibnitz

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Frances Ward

Woodward to Washington
[26 March 1949]

Saturday

Olson my friend—

Let me say first you manage always to present yourself on the right day—today is my birthday and when I received your letter[22] this morning and opened it and saw it was a letter I could not believe my eyes—

something I was very far from ever expecting to receive. I consider your letter quite literally the only birthday present I have ever received in my life.—

In general I agree about everything.

So happens there is a notebook written 14 years ago—I have been saving it until after my death because it has never seemed appropriate to do anything about publishing it while I was walking around. The thing came out all at one sitting, fast as I could write and scalding hot. I remember I wanted to be sure to do it before I forgot—before the pain cooled down. I know it has several sentences in it which are necessary and right. I will send it to you. I will ask you not to make any detailed comment because it has nothing to do with writing or books or achievement. It was something I was born to do and I did it. There are thousands of young woman errors in it—so very many I blush inside—but the point I am sure you will feel is—it has the other thing the thing no man anywhere has stated in words—the young woman terror—and I did not say fear. And a program—harsh as you could wish even though it is clothed in Moses language—the result of passionate Bible reading and doing—anyway Olson—after you have seen it we can talk. In the notebook it states definitely that I am not the one to *write* it—I am the one to live it—it states that there is a man—a writer—who will come after—you can judge yourself if it is you—certainly if it is not you, it is no one else. I have been waiting for this man, into whose hands to place it.

I resent that I sound so damned biblical—but it is the result of a chosen thing in adolescence, which permanently affected my whole speech every day. The reason the primer has the form it has is because I am not a writer and could never write a book and someone who loved me said I should do something—so I did the primer. The notebook is what should have gone with—to you.

The whole thing is very feminine—I mean all the reasons—I love Michelangelo and I love to have those beautiful things somewhere where I can see them and also I felt that it was good to make public my love. I looked at proofs in black and three shades of brown and chose the pink brown for a very good reason—I also love 14 and 15 and they looked so beautiful that way—then the one across from the dedication which I also am very devoted to has a Latin clarity of simple statement printed in the light color—as soon as you make it dark, it becomes ominous and brooding which I do not believe Michelangelo intended.

You said exactly the right thing about 14—I was searching everywhere

and when I saw the thing I stole it—not a print, a page from an old edition of Symonds *Life of MB.*[23]

I also very much love 15.

The first one and the last one are the same woman—from two angles—

I happen also to love (in the slang sense) I believe it is 4 (I have no copy here) the woman staring her head off at herself in the hand mirror with the brief statement.

And purely as a woman having nothing to do with a book the figure of the pregnant woman is the best summary of that whole deal in existence and the one with the head on her lap is the best summary of that particular little moment when you give up the ghost. I am just very grateful to him—like I said.

And the word "joyicity" Olson I put in on purpose for this reason—I had mentioned Blake and Rimbaud and I did not want to leave Joyce out so I put his word—anyway I thought it was his word—from the marvelous section in *Finnegans Wake* where the Gracehopper is entertaining Vespetilla and Flori and the other lovely ladies—"happy in his joyicity"

It was merely a passing salute of deep affection to a man whose arrogance I have always thought so good.

And as in the case of Michelangelo I wanted to state my love in public.

Like wonderful old Stendhal who had carved on his gravestone—"He loved Cimarosa, Mozart and Shakespeare."

I have been planning to start a publishing company for some time of some of the marvelous Byzantine studies and some of the very Russian philosophic religious questions not as yet translated from the Russian[24] and I thought it was silly to have *two* publishing companies for a very great total of at a maximum 5 books—and besides as long as I was being anonymous—what the hell—

Also I hoped to advertise the thing in *The New Yorker* and to intrigue old Vladimir Nabokov into sending for one—I used to work there and he writes some things for them now—not that it matters. If you think the thing doesn't say enough to advertise—just tell me—about money or any of the

other allurements I care as little as you guess.

I enclose a picture of myself which I believe you will like it as much as I do—it says something the book doesn't say—it is my old man, who is now somewhere else off this planet, whom needless to say, I adored. Return—please.

It will take several weeks to dig up the notebook—I will send registered—if it is yours—you may keep it.

Frances Motz

State College to Washington
[27 March 1949]

You will see how nutty I am because I was in bed when it occurred to me after re-reading your letter[25] that you thought the notes are comments on the pictures—so I have come up to my office to tell you how the thing came about.

In August 1948 I wrote the sentences exactly as they are—wording, order and the numbers attached. A very literal autobiography—may be the shortest on record.

I used to be a curator of art—I knew in a fairly accurate way that Michelangelo was the boy that for my money knew about women—he keeps saying over and over again the thing which you will find in my notebook. I own a few of the prints in the book. I have absolutely no money and damned little free time—so did not have all or even a fraction of Michelangelo at my disposal. I had precisely what I could take from the books in the possession of the College Library. I had copies made of all the ones that said anything about women.

When I made up page proofs for the book I came up to my office at night to work alone—here I sat and watched my sentences—his art. It was one of the most intensely exciting nights I have ever spent. Perhaps you

can find in your tarot pack the answer as to why they fit so uncannily. There is special reason behind each choice—Some day I will tell you what each one means to me. It took 2 weeks to decide to put the picture and wording of No. 2 together. Number 14 I was up a tree about. Nothing would do. So one day I got desperate I went to the office of a man who has a lot of stuff on Michelangelo he fortunately was in Mexico—I pulled my prestige to be allowed to enter alone and I looked through that pile of stuff until that magnificent answer fell into my hands. I promptly and quietly stole it for the meantime. It took courage for me to print it—it was very hard to send it to the printer—but I realized that the world is dumb—if something is labeled "Art" you would never catch them getting it confused with life.

You are probably the only human being who will see it who will understand how terrific the solution is—both on Mike's part and on mine.

There are places where the thing is so naked I deliberately chose a picture to lead astray.

But Olson—perhaps as I am towards you you are towards me—silent on things you have said which are too terrific—it took me twenty-five years to learn to do the one marked No. 25 which you passed in silence.

If what the dumb bastard wants to do is to get himself crucified then your part is to throw in everything you've got—and when the dead body lies in your lap—not to shudder—not to cry—not to turn down the lip—but to raise the hand in silent question—"Whose obedience has cost him the most—mine to endure his fate or his to endure his fate?" Anyhow—at the end of 25 years I bow my head in acquiescence—you do the one that gets handed to you.

I love you Olson as you goddamned well already know.

Washington to Woodward

29 March 1949 (postmark)

Immediately, this, as you ask[26]—with my delight, & thanks. You are quite as I might have imagined you to be.

And yr father, the kind of head almost gone away in this dirty time.

Yrs, Olson

Maximus of Tyre *Dissertations*

(If you happen to look on this side, & are curious of the above, the reference is 24(18), particularly

[quotation in Greek])[27]

Washington to Woodward (postcard)
30 March 1949 (postmark)

A propos joy-i-city (the personal meaning of which you convince me of,[28] which in no way diminishes the nix I put on it in the public print) cf. the current Herper's Boozoomzar (April, in other words,
spring, & only & exclusively spring by permission of MODESS)

p. 129
2nd column
28th line fr top
to end of para[29]

or Bra-zar
or Bubsie-zar
or Boob-zar
or any equally brazen offence.

yrs for shame
O

State College to Washington

[early April 1949]

I am not at all the type given to vulgar statements but page 150 of the same issue—re the first half of the last line of part 2 of your poem[30]—always arouses in me the desire to lift one out, and with the serious face of a Saks Fifth Avenue shopper—courteously inquire,

"And what would be the price per pound?"

I am sure Joyce could not laugh at one of his own, better than I—over your postcard—after the shock.

And again I thank you

reread Melville business[31] two nights ago—that is one magnificent statement—

the definition of a great portraitist is

1/2 sitter 1/2 artist—no one knowing which half is where—

Thus you.

Woodward to Washington
[early April 1949]

Your poem[32] is so open, so naked, so full of the exquisite and modest tenderness of a man who is forced to repeat the request for everything, that it makes me terribly shy. I feel as though an aristocrat has entered the door and laid aside his armor there—to be (away from butlers and servant girls) quickly transferred to his interior, where it becomes fire. See *Trinacria.*

There is a way in which I am extremely pleased that it should make a public appearance among the servant girls—those few readers who shall see it will have gratitude and the others will not even know to stare at you—

on account you leave your robes at home.

(And worse than servant girls I take it we both dislike professors)

I take "the good tree" to mean the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" Condemned by Blake—if other, and more—and you care to someday enlighten me—o.k.

Frances

May 1936[33]

If only Otto Weininger had not written that sentence, "If only one woman could be shown to have existed in relationship to the moral idea, then my entire theory would be blown to bits" *(Sex and Character)*

Let it be said at the beginning, that no woman has ever more completely given herself to man's ideas, or felt less antagonism towards him than I (so little antagonism that when I read in a German book that this feeling was universal, except in cases where a woman was born a courtesan type, I decided that I must be a courtesan type, and then, on different days, when I objected in my soul to this explanation, I decided that I felt an antagonism) and for this reason I have for many, many years suffered under the conviction that women possessed no souls, that I, myself, had none and in support of this belief, there is certainly abundance of evidence. How embarrassed I felt with myself when I happened to read in the notes in *Desert Islands* the story from the Bible of Ammon and Tamar. Much as I cherish the beauty of the prose, the simplicity and life justice of the remainder, what it reveals of a father's heart, no one can erase the memory of. "And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go?" The fact that even in the Bible the woman's shame is not important enough to dwell on, but only so, causes me to blush inwardly, for it is so apparent that as to the fate of her soul, no one is concerned, but only as to how she will be the instrument of her brothers' evil the one in doing, the other in atoning. And as far as I can remember there are no books in the world which are concerned with the fate of a woman's soul, but only concerned with woman as a tool, whereby man destroys or saves his own soul. Let no one suppose that I

object to this on foolish grounds of "It ought to have been otherwise"—the *fact* that it has not been otherwise burns a deep hole in me, that is all.

And so, I say, when I had read Weininger and followed closely all he had to say and knew in my soul it was far more true than untrue and came to his outline of the distinction between talent and genius and then to his question, taken by me seriously, "Is woman, then, a plant, or an animal or a human being?" I realized, all of a sudden, that it is foolish and wrong for me to deny to myself that I possess a soul—the facts are all definitely shouting that I do possess one and that perhaps I was born on this earth to *be* a soul and to show how it is possible.

. . . . .(on sense of vocation). . . .and expressing it. . . . it has actually occurred that a woman has lived on this earth who has taken upon her own soul all the burden of being a woman, all the shame, all the sorrow, all the inward disgrace, all the longing, all the lack of freedom and has felt guilty before life of the sins, the pettiness, of all women. (HERE IS THE CHRIST COMPLEX, almost wholly stated)

. . . .[she hopes she may, in the far-off ages, become the heritage of each woman, hope it is a secret plan of God's]

. . . .what I struggled for with almost super-human courage and it is another of God's miracles that a body could be sustained on this earth in comparative health which has fed on nothing but intense agony for so many important years. But remember Dostoevsky, who was a greater miracle, and be silent. (!!!

Can I speak in this place of how flowingly, how reaching to the sides to touch, stream-like, I love every human being on this earth? Even my mother, whom I have disliked more intensely than any other person I have met? Who stands to me for the qualities in life which I abjure.

Let me go back and begin now, where I first remember. I remember my father, seated beside my mother in the upper sitting room handing to me the wet diaper of my tiny sister and asking me to carry it to the bathroom; the intense dislike with which I touched it and how carefully I held the very smallest edge I possible could in order to convey it, the satisfaction with which I laid it down and ran away. Just now it occurs to me that this may have been one of the causes why I always disliked my sister, until I had reached the age of 16. It also is clear to me now why my father hounded me so—to be rid of this quality of fastidiousness, which was one of my chief inheritances.

. . . .loneliness. . . . deep opposition of father

To Illustrate, and I would never put this on paper if I did not know that I will be out of this life before these words are read, when I was perhaps ten, I went one Sunday morning into his room without rapping, to reach from a lower dresser something I needed for Sunday School and he jumped from his bed as though touched by bolt of lightning and rushed across the room to strike at me and missed my head by perhaps the smallest part of an inch and left in a plaster wall so deep an indentation that plaster fell down inside (it was covered by wallpaper) and left a deep place for many months, until the room was repapered. I hurried out, said nothing—mother found it out, of course, but in my breast I will always remember the silence which struck in on me at that moment, the open-eyed, quiet child knowledge that life was composed of dark things

. . . .then, or later. . . .the deep antagonism lying between a man and a woman. . . .At least I learned one good lesson, which none of the dead intellectuals know, and that is that passion is in no sense a thing to be played with, it strikes out of anywhere and all you can do is to scatter or succumb, you can not say it isn't so.

At what age, then, did I begin to promise myself that I would never tease a man, that I would never play with his feelings, that I would never by word or a look imply something which I did not mean and that if I did give, by accident, such a word or a look that I would live up to it honorably and give as much as I promised

. . . .the years had so quick an eye for beauty and when I also embraced the Christian ideal wholly. . . .and came to know the soul of Russia through her books and through the faces of the children in my Soho library ((???))

Outwardly and inwardly I was a clean human being. . . .and would not allow my little finger to betray my weakness and prayed ardent prayers to God that I might regard my body as a temple. . . .sadness, but i did not *feel* innocent, and the feeling of guilt mounted and mounted in me—not then, but later, and became the undertone of my whole life.

(obviously, the guilt, of masturbation, or repression, and so, when, as it goes on, it comes out, the quote, fr Zossima, "We are all guilty of one another's sins and each must bear on his own soul the guilt of all men," and she yeas,

and says, I knew it at 18, only
then I had no proof I knew it.

the young man who laughed, when she said, I am as guilty as you, and she goes on, "I know what it was, it was the ardent, ardent wish that I had committed sins, more than he, and that in the knowledge of my sins and the love of my heart, I could say, in his sense, truly, "I am as guilty as you are." Every man longs to be forgiven—but he can not believe that an innocent human being can be guilty or can forgive. Christ did it, but he knew the sins, because He is God. And this is the reason why I praise God that he gave me *the burden of the sin of my body* to bear for so long a time—because, now, when I say to my husband "you are not guilty", quietly, quietly in his soul he feels joy—for I, who have known sin consider his sin to have been of no moment(!). I never wish to imply that I can forgive in God's sense, only that for a fellow human being to forgive in the human sense, being very conscious of the full meaning of the crime, is very comforting to the human soul.

(2 p passage on May, how beautiful life is, on Christ and his doubting his mission, and how divine that makes him to her, and Goethe, that nature has proceeded, not by wild eruptions but by slow, or maybe quick, but quite quiet, change. . . .

I am not sure that what was in Him is not in me—I feel so entirely close to what He was that it seems as though no time has elapsed, and though I shall never die for man, nor be divine, I feel that my life is for man and is a gift, smaller and gentler, but made of a little piece of what made Him . . . .The quality of love felt towards man is of like kind.

. . . .My soul was given back to me by a miracle

. . . .From whence came the sudden knowledge that each man desired to save his soul—that the pain of his body was nothing to him? There were twenty odd years I did not know this, and one day, sitting in my nice green chair, I looked at the title page of a book in which was written a quotation from Byron, and I knew it. And since then it has been the purpose of my life to help each human being on this earth *to gain the possession of his own soul and to gain it in joy.*

I have not acted outwardly as though this were my purpose—
outwardly I have worried about my appearance and about jobs
and about parties I was giving and about how to cover up the
enormous difference between myself and the people with whom
(!) I was; I have said mean things, not because I felt them but to hide

from another person the embarrassing sight of how mean his meanness was; I have pretended to a hundred (!) weaknesses I do not possess, to take away my feeling of strangeness between me and whatever woman I was with; I have talked empty platitudes, to cover my silence and I have feigned helplessness, for another to understand that I needed him. I have done worse, I have acted with love, real love, towards a human being whom I hated and desired to see dead because he caused me such terrible suffering, praying to God to forgive me for showing love towards one whom I did not love and underneath both the love and the hate, which were of actual life and were in themselves the process of growing, as plants stick out new leaves, I know that the love was the real part, because I felt the pain of my husband's soul, but in order to protect myself, in order to be able to live and to endure the suffering of the terrible accusations he put on me and that I deserved, but for which I had already paid so deep a penalty, my body and heart, me, in this life, not my eternal self, put out all over me a thick covering of intense hatred and in that hatred I lived until strength for top love, as well as bottom love, came to me. This hatred was not only to protect my inner life from the terrible sorrow of absolutely not being believed, but also was to protect me from the terrible misery of seeing how deep was his suffering, how much greater to endure than mine, for he had the earthly and also soul shame of having married a woman who seemed for that time to have been without shame and without honour, and also the terrible frightening necessity to depend on her for aid, to be unable to leave her because of love and to have no chance to work in life in a fine way which would be great enough to cause forgetfulness, or great enough to prove his worth or even great enough to prove his love and to have almost no hope. Later there was no hope at all, but in the beginning, there *was* hope of fine work ahead, otherwise he would not have lived at all. As it was, his terrible hallucinations are as great a suffering as Ivan had in BK which only a Russian soul could endure.

. . . .what to tell. . . .so many cheap confessions. . . .Every strength which I have possessed has come to me directly from the courageous life of someone in the past—Let the one reader, then, who will have a great soul, interpret

How clearly stands out each detail of the night which separated me from my past. It was June 4, 1923, clear, with stars and dark trees. The place where we were was surrounded by beauty, but the unevenness and

coarseness of the grass and stubble immediately around was ugly, as so often happens in nature's scenes. Everyone knows the rise and fall of the heart when two are young, the hope and disappearance of hope at any rate, I asked a question, forgotten now, and for reply there came, slowly, "You know how it is". For me they were filled with such an unanswerable pain; it was commanded that I should assuage it. I remember the brief second of the feeling of doom and the impossibility of withstanding it. But what I want to speak of are the few moments between which I arose and made my way to the car and placed myself in it—no foot ever felt so heavy, the extreme slowness with which I walked, the complete unimportance of my physical pain, the tender quiet way in which I opened the door and folded my skirts and closed it again. I was as completely sad as only the earth itself can be; (!) I had no anger, no surprise, no worry, no thought of what I had lost or if it could have been otherwise. Only the gentlest, gentlest penetrating sadness from which I could not escape. What I have never been able to find out is, *why* is the soul sad when the body comes to maturity? I believe to every other problem of life of which I am aware I have found an answer for myself—but this question neither I, nor anyone I could or have discovered has so far been able to answer. Weininger says that coitus in itself is not a sin—it is only because man's soul is completely submerged that it is sinful. (!). And I remember now that many years later I came to the conclusion that it is to give the soul a brief reprieve from its endless search that we are so blind, so altogether lost—that his blindness is the only kind in the world which will cover up the soul's pain for a moment. Not that this is in any way an answer to the question of why man grieves at the loss of his innocence.—I think if we knew the answer we would know for sure whether or not man possesses an immortal soul.

> (the days following—sorrow, refusing to see the boy, sorrow, conviction she had gone against her beloved Christ—finally sat down and wrote confessed to a girl thousand miles away

. . . . no desire to write this, but somewhere I *must* say how strongly I protest the accepted version of woman's character. Let the genius who will come after me write a great book—I only desire to drop a hint as to how the life was lived, the life wherein God set one woman free.

All of a woman's troubles proceed from the fact that she never admits to herself her fundamental inequality. When I used to torment myself daily with the question, "Why can a woman not create something of the first rate, why are all her works not great, but full of immense talent only?", I finally was, in a brief moment, brought face to face with the idea that in woman there is no necessity. Every woman is an actual or a potential mother—that satisfaction which penetrates to the last corpuscle in her body, to her

subconscious life, to her blood, as well as to her mind and nerves, when she brings forth a child, is complete. It is the only complete satisfaction known on this earth, and it is complete because it is filled with all possibilities, each time. Life is magic, none of us are aware of what it is—neither Plato, nor Gogol, nor Rameses. But we all know it contains wonderful possibilities—and a woman has that deep, unspoken knowledge in herself when her child is brought forth. Now a man is never granted to create in this life any one thing, any painting, any book, any piece of music which will satisfy him—he and all others will be able to find in it some fault. It can not grow—it is finished. And this fact that it is not perfect is what tears his vitals and causes him to go crazy and demands that he shall try again—every time he hopes that he shall have a whole thing—some times he approaches almighty God in the beauty of what he has done, but never really. So he lies awake and in his soul—through thousands of years, dissatisfaction has been his daily bread. Out of that pain comes his intense mastery, his freedom, his glory and his bitterness. For life he never will be able to grasp. Now a woman cannot grasp life either, but she is it—she partakes. Once—for a brief second, I felt in all its joy this superb possession which a woman has, of life—and I felt in my heart the terrible loneliness which crushes down a man, because he can only attempt to revisualize it, he can not be it. In this one moment, I felt sorry for man (here, here, lady, who wants it, who.) I have never forgotten that sorrow, but I have never been able before or since to glory in a woman's belongingness.

This belongingness is what I want to speak of—this is a woman's enemy, her terror, the cause of every sin, of every weakness, of all mystery. She can not be free. And she does not know it, except, rarely. Weininger points out, in bitterness, how deeply a woman craves coitus, how every moment is towards or away from, but centered on, fruition. Has he, or any man, any man, including Christ, ever once expressed what a terrifying burden this is—did woman make herself bound, or was she born bound—does she not belong all days, in all moods, to the earth—and is this not the cause of her great sadness, her slavery, her pettiness, her vengeance, her intense pursuit and glory in a man's soul's betrayal, her triumph in a child, her never ending convergence on her own tangent? Let him who has a great soul weigh this in silence—*who* is responsible for the profound inequality of a man and a woman—for the absolute impossibility of her escape from earth. Who? No one. Then let his soul stand up and recognize that injustice is inherent in the nature of our earth—that only God can conceive of an answer and it does not lie here. Weininger says, "Let a woman give up the desire for coitus and she will become free." I realize the beauty and longing (SHIT) with which Weininger wrote, but he is wrong, nevertheless. A woman cannot give up coitus—it would result only in that she would cease to be—not in

her freedom. This 20th century affords many examples of women who have tried—other generations also—the result is so pathetic, so unfree—so miserable, that no great man could possibly think of this as the answer. What I say is,—let a woman admit in her soul her burden—let her say to herself—I am a lesser creature, from me no great thing will ever proceed ((THIS IS THE RUB, for FB,))—let her realize that each soul on this earth stands in complete, imperishable, not-for-one-second-ending solitude—let her say to herself "The earth is complete sorrow—I will never, at any moment, believe in or seek my own happiness, and though it be logically an absurdity, let me live for the sake of other human beings, for their happiness." This is a task the strength for which must proceed from God—few shall attain, but she who does, shall emerge, miraculously, free.

Paul I Timothy 2:11–15 quoted. . . .she protests. . . .on woman as transgressor. . . ."why has no religion, since the beginning of time, been great enough to perceive that woman is precisely not deceived, that therein lies her tremendous tragedy, but that she is *forced* to obey the rule of the earth which lies deeply within her?

(more Paul)

It has been a facile explanation—Eve's guilt—how profound an injustice

The necessity to endure—the will to life—*it is* the cause of her hypocrisy. Could a woman face life—and live? ((WELL?)) Could a woman say to herself where she stands and what she is and go on? What has man to offer her that is of the slightest value, once she realizes the place in which she is—can any *thing* of this earth, jewels, house, children, comfort, security leisure answer to her for her essential inequality ((SHIT))—they can not.

(then Jesus, go, and sin no more. . . ..she says, not enough. For to a woman it is not a sin, *neither is it a good thing*—it is a law from which she has not the power to escape. And since this law is part of the earth's rhythm, since therefore it moves in the immense body rhythm of the universe—it shall some day, by God, be reconciled, We do not know how.

The body of a woman is an instrument—the only one she has completely at her command. . . .and how ever hard a woman has struggled to despise her body, she has never been successful. It is herself.

Can the great man, therefore, when he has bowed himself down to the earth, for the refreshment of which he stands in need in proportion as his greatness takes him off this earth O can he, when having received that

refreshing blindness, have pity on the blindness that gave him succour? The greater the man is the more highly resentful is he of his earthly attachment, of his human frailty (!)—he would love to be of God—Godlike (!), and so when he returns to the earth and restores the earthly man, after he is refreshed, in his new strength he is apt to strike out against the necessity and the nearest and most obvious "cause" is woman. The hatred which man has in the moments when he has arisen from his trappedness I do not despise—all that I say is, Let a man beat his own breast, not the woman, for neither he nor she is to blame and in addition *she bears the humility of having to want his weakness.*

Let no man, great or small, take unto himself glory because a woman has so great a need for him—let no man, either great or small, think to himself that he perceives the whole woman, perceiving her need. For the need of woman is a great covering which she must penetrate, and I see no other way open to her to come through that covering, but *by wearing it out* . . . .This is why Thais. . . .Sonia. . . .excessive use and there, shining through the worn places, was the most pure soul(!)

(This is not what she is, this covering, but only what she must come through in order to be herself.

And when she has, she has emerged, sometimes, well nigh a direct child of God—witness Gorki's grandmother.
. . . .However it may be, this is true, that if a woman were permitted to use her body at the age when it is pressing most closely about her, to whatever full extent that body required, when the moment of sufficient use had passed, she would be ready to take her place in life with all sincerity
. . . . completely selfless
. . . .obvious reason why not, is, a woman can not drip seeds nor does she care to—the law of nature's waste.
. . . .that body a sounding board from which she would like to hear every note—she usually hears one or two. . . .wakes up, man's rules, strikes out blindly—to grasp when it is too late—
How wise must be the woman who knows her own need at her own hour.
Marriage. This almost every woman is wise enough to seek. But fulfillment according to her own need is why DHL—he knew a woman *must* find according to her
own need, or her life will add further impotency.
. . . .but not enuf—another necessity: the desire to win respect. Now follows a law: when the body is indulged in without restraint, it chokes the soul.

If by some honest fallacy such as I myself struggled under (that a man's bodily pain is as great as a woman's. . . .so never flirt). . . .but this error, and have no idea where answer lies

It is this desire for respect which has led woman to confuse her own issues—It is because man can be free from his body, can possess his own soul in strength, that a woman so passionately believes in him. It is also why she hates him. A woman who loves a man finds in him this freedom. If ever she suspects that he has lost it, have he every other good thing & be he ever so kind to her, to the woman he is a useless, pitiable object & she despises him. This is why a woman will follow. . . .rain. . . .sleet. . . .devotion—what man stands in need of. A woman, on the other hand, can, by and large, never gain the respect due her, except rarely, rarely, in the eyes of one man who will glimpse what she is. . . .

What she wants much much more than love, no matter what she says . . . .

So, commanding: if a woman loves a man, she will [carelessly?] offer him devotion and he will not respect her—for respect from either sex can be based upon one thing only—the freedom of soul, but love from a woman obliterates her distance, makes her literally belong to him, because he is free and therefore better than she is and it is this freedom which she worships. This is how a woman can be nurture in the physical sense to a man whom she loves—her body is separate from her desire for freedom—because her body works. . . .because the important thing in her eyes in the man she loves is exactly his freedom from the need of her. And she knows no *man* gives his body without tenderness.

Why the law which has allowed sexual license to man and forbids it to woman is so cruel.

She stands in terrific need of license—despising her need but nevertheless feeling it—whereas a man is in no need whatsoever—his body, if taken care of by a passionate woman, is answered and he can go on about his life. The reason he does so frequently betray his beloved, sexually, is that he seeks separateness, and, continually, in a new person, has the illusion of finding it. It is for this deep cause that I believe men and women should not marry because of love, but this on mutual respect. And the only way a woman can gain a man's respect is to be more free of him.

State College to Washington
8 May 1949 (postmarked 9 May 1949)

Sunday night

Olson—

Just dropped into my office on a hunch—just came up this minute from Woodward—which is so very subtly penetrating— a marvelous place to come to write.

There are several facts I should love to tell you so that you can think of them in making plans for your coming year— I am moving to Albuquerque New Mexico around June 15-22—my place in Woodward I am absolutely sure you would love and if you are not tied up in a job or in the fall or Christmas vacation or all year would like to live there I am sure you would find it very perfect and of course you would be free to invite a friend if you so cared. It has three bedrooms a marvelous old pot-belly stove which does a terrific job—beautiful view—it is an old barber shop reconverted—anyhow I am sure you would love it—I went through real sacrifices to pay for the damn thing and just as I get the last check mailed I have to give it up—I would never rent it—I am not the type—so if you care to make use of it at any time I will mail you my keys of which I have a duplicate set. I hope you will not think there is any subterfuge lurking in all this—there is not—I can not be there—I love it dearly and I believe you will too and it is all paid for and since I tore the insides out and designed it myself it is very much me and we would know each other better—I do not care how long is required for you to know if my notebook can be employed by you—if it can I shall be very happy, but I in a deep sense consider it someone else's business—like God.

Your friend

Frances now Ward

State College to Washington
10 May 1949 (postmark)

Addenda—

1. No. 14—the reason you have never seen this anywhere is because the art historians in their great majesty have decided Michelangelo probably did not draw it—it is a drawing in preparation for an allegorical painting which he never completed—I believe he sent it as a gift to his Tommasino but of that I am not sure—it is in the private possession of a man in Paris—

2. If you are connected with a college ask the librarian to borrow for you from the Library of Congress Franz Cumont's volume of plates in color on the frescoes found at Dura-Europos.[34] (This fresco was destroyed by the Arabs and now exists nowhere in the world except in these colored reproductions.) There is a particular plate which I wish to talk with you about which will drive you wild—a priest in a ceremony—the look in the eyes the Christian world has not so far touched—the unworld brought to view—Rostovtzeff says this fresco is the long sought link between the Western and Eastern worlds—I can get you lots of dope—accurate—in case I have not given enough to locate the book which is probably in the reference room—[35]

The whole Byzantine world—Sumerian world and Dura-Europos absolutely drive me crazy—I had to get excited all by myself—since no one else seems to care—I have a pamphlet on Gilgamesh I will also send to you—[36]

Anyway I believe the salutation used by that young Roman patrician whose name I always forget—whom Michelangelo loved—to be the most beautiful in history—

"Unique, my lord" —

3. Also a very marvelous Byzantine history by a great Russian historian Vasiliev—vols No. 14–15 of Wisconsin Social Studies translated by Ragozin[37]—he lives in Washington—I can get his address if you would desire it. (In this history there is a gal who is more like me than any female I have ever met—perhaps she could suggest a form—I forget the details.)

Woodward to Washington
16 May 1949 (postmark)

Olson—

I am sorry but since Rimbaud the only person's poetry I can take is yours (you know Francis Thompson & Garcia Lorca are excluded from this comment)—I am no Yeats lover—I get ill and unhappy when I look at literary reviews—I hate the first article and I hate the review on Starkie's book on Rimbaud because I loathe that book—I am glad Rimbaud can not see it—[38]

When I was digging through some of that old Byzantine stuff I came across a sentence from a Second Crusader—so man—so man and so loved I purposely forget it to find afresh—the idea that the beauty of Constantinople causes the heart to tremble of the most valiant who has won his way there. Shaken to its inmost existence—like the letter of Michelangelo who refused the dinner invitation because "You must know that of men living I am the most given to loving and when I see something to command respect in another—I love him so completely and give myself so entirely that from your banquet I would come home not refreshed but exhausted"—(very loosely). *Anyhow* the tremble Starkie aint got.

All of which is to say I feel dirty in literary reviews—I save myself by remembering the beginning of *Jerusalem* where Blake so quietly and unironically attaches pity to Palamabron to the spirit of Evil.

It doesn't matter if you can't read my writing—I am getting so I hate almost everything but silence and your poems are so ardently aware of silence—until the new harsh form shall flower—oh Olson—harsh—(in a bloom so sternly and so unexotically alive)

I am sending Northrop Frye who deserves them—a copy of your poems.

Woodward to Washington
[about 20 May 1949]

Olson—

This was given me by Kramer—whom I just walked in on one day at the Un. of Pa. Museum and started to talk to—There is a very nice translation by William Hilary Leonard—*Gilgamesh* in Woodward under my good father's name.

I love very deeply—the lines at the opening of *Call me Ishmael.* Are they early Swedish?

Hope to go to New York in June for a hunt for some Byzantine art Russian original manuscripts.

[Enclosure: offprint of S.N. Kramer "The Epic of Gilgames and its Sumerian Sources" reprinted from *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 64 (1944) 7-23. The following note was written inside the front cover of the offprint:]

I thank you for the *Western Review*[39]—which I was unable to buy or borrow in State College. I approve of its typography—will look at the articles—I have been grateful and many many times have used the prayer

We who are awkward ask

I notice the novel by Herbert Read—I found in *Graphis* 24 a very fine article by him—was quite amazed because I did not expect any official Unesco's to come up with something I could respect and value.

Washington to Woodward
23 May 1949

Mond May 23 xlix

FM:

I have started K's Gilgam over coffee, but break off to write you & send one of my earliest verses, unpublished, on G, for you.[40]

You will excuse me, you have not heard before, but I only returned from another Black Mt fatigue-duty yesterday. By the way, does Albuquerque mean the Univ of NM? if so, my present, (and only disciple?), a Jack Rice down there at BM, I learned this past week, goes to NM in the fall to take up the career the two of us have shaped for him this winter, kultur-morphologie (to steal a description from Frobenius). Rice is in danger of rigidities due to a sense of himself as temple-builder, but he has gone farther than anyone in taking such same cues as ISHMAEL presents. I have the feeling that field work (& further translation & acquaintance with Frobenius) plus the discipline of americanist study (which seems to me more fixed than more ancient research) may keep him in line and cause him to be of use.

You may meet him.

And it is fine, to have from you yr house in Woodward to light on, comes the event. I have no present way to know what the next year brings. If I could manage to acquire this house here (it costs 20,000, is bank priced 7500), such acquisition patently to be gift of one or more non-existent, or not yet dreamed up sponsors, then I would have BASE; and would, I'm sure, start moving around like mad. It looks now that, by fall, I shall either have to have it or get the hell out. So things are water.

Or does yr last notes indicate your New Mexico move is postponed?[41]

The Michelangelo quote is impeccable: oi how true

& harsh, is it?

oooooooooooo

They are Early olson

Do you know V Berard on the Odyssey?[42]
is the frobenius of same

TOMORROW

I am Gilgamesh,
an Ur world is in me
to inhabit.

Race of waters run
in the blood
red with the fathers.

They told me of flood,
of the earth dissolved,
of drowned mountains.

I live in the land
and know people,
see love recur.

They said the heart
knows no evolution:
it is as it was when it is.

They called me Gilgamesh
and gave me Ur
where I dwell.

for FM
for what it is
Olson

written 1941

xlix

Washington to Woodward
25 May 1949

LA CHUTE

O my drum, hollowed out thru the thin slit,
carved from the cedar wood, the base I took
when the tree was felled
o my lute
wrought from the tree's crown

my drum whose lustiness
was not to be resisted

my lute from whose pulsations
not one could turn away

They
are where the dead are
my drum
fell where the dead are, who
will bring it up, my lute
who will bring it up
where it fell in the face of them
where they are, where my lute and drum

have fallen?

fm:
recognize it?[43] my
thanks
olson
may 25
xlix

Notes

1 Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* was published in New York by Reynal & Hitchcock on 17 March 1947.

2 Olson had come to the west coast in August 1947 to lecture at the Northwest Writers Conference at the university of Washington in Seattle, and had stayed on in California, scenting a valuable research project. He had written to Monroe Engel 27 December 1947: "It started at the Huntington, led to the Bancroft (Berkeley) then here to Sutter's Fort &

Cal. State Library. The results are so good I have been asked to publish a couple of the finds." The publication from this research was Olson's introduction to *The Sutter-Marshall Lease* for the Book Club of California in 1948.

3 The poem "In Praise of the Fool" appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* for December 1947, p. 194.

4 German adjective meaning "unequalled."

5 This retort must refer to a letter from Boldereff not now extant; as must also the comment on "Fool" below.

6 Olson wrote to Monroe Engel at Viking Publishers the same day requesting their *Portable Dante:* "What I was after was DE VULGARE ELOQUENTIA, in English, now that my Latin has dwindled."

7 "In Praise of the Fool" will appear with slight alteration as "The Green Man" in *Y & X* (Black Sun Press 1948).

8 Presumably the inscription was to go with the "design" referred to in Olson's next postcard, a design no longer extant.

9 Olson had finished "The Fiery Hunt" and was soon to finish "Troilus"—see the posthumous publications in *The Fiery Hunt and Other Plays* (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation 1977).

10 Olson wrote these lines in a New York art gallery in April 1948—*A Nation of Nothing But Poetry* p. 58 and Butterick's note pp. 183–184.

11 This is the request referred to by Olson when, sending "The Kingfishers" 26 October 1949, he said: "The enclosed is in answer to a question you asked me one year & five months ago."

12 Boldereff enclosed a note mailed from State College, Pennsylvania, on 23 November 1948, in a wrongly addressed envelope which was returned by the post office. The short note was a question:

To—
Charles Olson

Is your green man the Green Man of Blake's Jerusalem?

FB

13 Olson presumably wrote out his short poem "The K" *(Selected Writings* p. 159; *Collected Poems* p. 14) on the back of an envelope and mailed it as such.

14 *A Primer of Morals for Medea* was published in March 1949.

15 William Blake, "Jerusalem," plate 5, l. 34.

16 One of the five poems in *Y & X.* Boldereff has received the book via the publisher of Black Sun Press, Caresse Crosby, who had sent a telegram from Washington on 31 December 1948 that it was being sent Special Delivery.

17 Olson sent the poem "Siena 1948" on 22 December 1948. The text is as published in *Western Review* 13 (Winter 1949) 100, and in *Collected Poems* pp. 78-79.

18 The first line of one of the poems in Olson's *Y & X*, published later with "Moebus" changed to "Moebius"—*Selected Writings* pp. 162–163; *Collected Poems* pp. 54-55. The poem also includes the phrase "itself a leopard," quoted later in this letter.

19 A phrase from "La preface" in *Y & X, Selected Writings*, pp. 160–61, *Collected Poems* pp. 46-47.

20 From "The Moebus strip" in *Y & X*.

21 This privately printed volume was sent to Olson on publication, 4 March 1949. The numbered passages correspond to photographic plates of Michelangelo's sculptures.

22 Olson's letter in response to *A Primer of Morals for Medea* is missing. We subsequently learn that it was stolen by Duke Ward, whose name Frances had taken at the time (the book is copyrighted by "Frances Ward").

23 John A. Symonds, *Life of Michelangelo*.

24 Olson presumably had been curious as to why *A Primer of Morals for Medea* had been published under the imprint of "Russian Classic Non-Fiction Library."

25 Olson's missing letter in response to *A Primer of Morals for Medea*.

26 Olson presumably is returning the photograph sent by Boldereff in her letter on 26 March 1949.

27 Olson's source, the bilingual Loeb Classical Library *Lyra Graeca* ed. J.M. Edmonds (1922) vol. 1, p. 154 gives the English translation: "both declaring that their beloved were many in number and that they were captivated by all beautiful persons."

28 Boldereff's letter of 26 March 1949 discussed this word, which she used in *A Primer of Morals for Medea*.

29 Desmond Harmsworth "James Joyce: A Sketch" *Harper's Bazaar* (April 1949) p. 129—the two sentences Olson directs our attention to are: "He seemed to tap a private source of Panic laughter. It was a separate art of Joyce's, and it did not deserve to perish."

30 Olson's poem is "In the Hills South of Capernaum, Port," in *Harper's Bazaar* (April 1949) p. 193; the last line of part 2 begins: "The life is more than meat." See *Collected Poems* p. 61.

31 Presumably *Call Me Ishmael*.

32 Again, "In the Hills South of Capernaum, Port," from which the phrase "the good tree" is quoted below.

33 When Olson received her May 1936 notebook from Boldereff he typed the following extracts for his own use before returning it; he added his own comments occasionally, sometimes in the form of question marks or exclamation marks.

34 Presumably the second part of Franz Gamont *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* (Paris 1926). Olson's poem "Dura," drafted on the back of an envelope sent to Boldereff 25 May 1949, begins "To come to the look in the sacrificer's eyes" *(Collected Poems* p. 85).

35 Michael I. Rostovtzeff excavated the Turkish site with Franz Cumont and wrote *Dura-Europos and Its Art* (Oxford 1938).

36 Boldereff sent soon afterwards an offprint of S.N. Kramer "The Epic of Gilgames and its Sumerian Sources" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* LXIV (1944) 7-23, adding a note: "This was given me by Kramer—whom I just walked in on one day at the Un. of Pa. Museum and started to talk to—". Olson made much use of it, both immediately and later, writing on 19 January 1968: "I still carry that paquette of his, sent to you, around as one of my holy goods."

37 A.A. Vasiliev *History of the Byzantine Empire* trans. S. Ragozin 2 vols. (Madison: University of Wisconsin 1928–29).

38 Edith Starkie *Arthur Rimbaud* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949).

39 The Winter 1949 issue of *Western Review* contained Olson's poem "Siena," sent to Boldereff previously in typescript. She quotes the last line of the poem below.

40 This early Gilgamesh poem, "Tomorrow," is dated 1941 on the copy enclosed with this letter (see *Collected Poems* p. 9 and p. 645.)

41 Boldereff's reply of 25 May 1949 indicates that she is ending her brief marriage to Duke Ward and not leaving Pennsylvania.

42 Olson, in exchange for Kramer, offers Boldereff the name of a commentator on Homer he had discovered via Edward Dahlberg. He later owned Victor Berard's *Did Homer Live? (New York: Dutton 1931).*

43 Olson has adapted lines from Gilgamesh translated by S.N. Kramer on p. 20 of the article Boldereff had sent him.

GERRIT LANSING
IN THE GRIP OF THE OCTOPUS

To be useless is not without use,

as the temperature mounts,

and how we are offered the tincture of dog,

dementia unveiled in the niches where lions repose,

this burnt-out expanse.

Halidom, then, and she comes to your aid,

desire hard in the branches of icecream.

Veer, only to veer, a method of ease
that is no method at all, a wash cloth.

Strip and proclaim, or whisper like hair of the wind
"No wonder the cowboy opens his fly
as the mother takes him in hand."

Eh bien, aujourd'hui

qui est l'émissaire du Dr. Wang Foo?

JACKSON MAC LOW
TWO POEMS

A CURIOUS OCCASION

a poem for John Cage after his 79th birthday

Wretchedness shagbark glyph decent bide rodent semen
  cheaters
Aberrant incredible insole poverty radium
Sheetrock eviscerate

Motorola pepper tack word leaky quiet
Pinacotéca chickadee samphire anomie cheroot query cart
  empirical
Viscount iridium eleemosynary occupy actorism tack.
Belay

Esposito

Titanic theorbo notation ichthyological knee-deep sock ballast
Parturition methadone passerine mescaline
Kettering alack passerine crater swipe peon policy escape
Jeepers effervescent worm cheaters coomb when law
Insole shield veal grasp hysteresis
Kettering methadone activity ataraxia tephra
Chicken Little cheesecloth occupy
Street ichthyological tube luxury
Thanotopsis taffeta cyborg ballast exude

*Caesural spaces: 3 letter spaces [ ] = 1 unaccented syllable;
6 letter spaces [ ] = 1 accented syllable or "beat";

Sources & Means: "Forties 16" (JML); GEN (John Unger); DIASTEX4 (Charles O. Hartman < JML's diastic method, 1963) using "36 Mesostics Re and Not Re Marcel Duchamp" #12 (John Cage) as seed & title source; & editing: caesural spaces, capitals, formatting (JML)

7 September 1991; 10 February 1992
New York

ANCIENTS

for Annie

Ancients encrust dense fruitless coalescence bantam art.
Paik daughter o'.
Petrini repentance congratulation hebetude grease bitartrate.
Calcimine eagle curve.

Layers of.

Twang.

Mackerel serum handrail photo opportunity draftsman accord.
Kneehole.

Fundamental.
Agrippa stonecrop bunched ornament.

Guilt fragile sequitur moment inquietude forcible.

Golem hippopotamus ballots airline
Iridescence cedars tense.

Parchment.

Throne cordage deprogramming rapids about *and the Pauper.*
Renascence typical ragweed bittersweet frank spiral.
Morgue paprika oriented visitation kneehole.

Growth ziggurat fold field butter-'n'-egg lamb's tesseract.
Tansy margin handcar saloon.
Spanish alarm inauguration.
Cannibal panic secretary bestial oriented drink.
Pragmatic.

Signify direction cumulative misguide globe zinc calcification.

English smoke glimpse.

Tribune tarnish.
Marble wind motion cleanse ash intrigue.
Fenster social keeper before the group whicker margarita.
Quotient forest mistletoe misguide grasp litter.
Killer girl converges angles torments day someone.
Torrid.

Swedish flagon.

Commission a certain point incomprehension.

Wintered liaison tesseract blank trouble slick flag housing.
Daughter o'.
Verdant.
Penelope guest gill tile.

Mellow farce encrusted traffic pantry.

Dormant slide terror angles acid.
Ancient.

Lincoln petition.
Iridescence bark.
Grieve clitoris misguide quotient rennet laborate.

Requested guarantee fix.
Golem field grave winces timocracy parsimony cardinal handle.

Seasonal *espressivo.*
Alp snazzy tone.
Ammiana readership bantam graves climb frogman.

Pallid daughter o'.
Verdant.
Penelope glister rick folk art poplars *morte* florist trap.
Sapper curve.

Word.
Mirror orchestral axis onto denotative minipotato scoreboard.
Beeswax grave cliché rung.
American ballot gladiator claymore gladiator misuse.
Pellegrino.

Till sensemonger.
Iridescence torn.
Baby strike.

Derived from JML's 100-poem series Twenties (New York: Roof Books, 1991; written 2/24/89–6/3/90) via nonintentional operations involving the computer programs TRAVESTY (Hugh Keener & Joseph O'Rourke) and DIASTEX4 (Charles O. Hartman's automation of a diastic text-selection method developed by JML in 1963), using the name "Annie Brigitte Gilles Tardos" as seed string, and editing: caesural spacing, punctuation, capitalization, formatting, etc. (JML).

4 March and 15 May 1991; 2 January 1992
New York

JOHN TAGGART

SAINTE-CHAPELLE

IN MEMORY OF OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Specifically the rose window specifically the center
center of the rose left to right bottom to top
left to right the receiver kneeling with tightly closed eyes
kneeling before orange claws of the sender

candlestick elaborate nail there are several nails
hand of the sender reaches toward a nail
sitting in black and purple robes sitting on a rainbow
sender on green rainbow reaching toward a nail

four stars pale yellow stars eruptions out of the blue
eruptions out of the blue that will not heal
sender wears a knot of deeper yellow
receiver prays to untie the knot prays and suffers

on each side of the sender a nail ever ready nail
between the nails a two-edged sword
sender holds a two-edged sword in his mouth
sword in his mouth his mouth a black "x" stretching wide.

MILTON KESSLER

RIDING FIRST CAR: *LEARNING THE BOXES*

:

A man with a fast heart
rests on a hill in a grass jacket
and gilt hat flower,
face facing bursting light.

:

The flowered armless chair
rides next to the armed solid one.

:

As toy cathedrals the migrants dig
their daily coin.

Circus trucks wait
to pick up the dark backs.

:

To lie far from your lamp corner
in a chasm of falling thoughts
and the mist above them.

:

Shy and stiff-thighed at the party
left profile colder than right

goes from stranger to stranger.

:

Do people ever sit here, she says.
It's a nice spot.

Oh yes, he says.

:

These leaves and buds have keyways passwords
for every twisting gust of breaking out beside
masts, buttresses and russet bells of giant firs.

:

A woman with a bruised eye and cracked glasses
settles in and sugars her coffee.

:

I notice down there I'm wearing
Van Gogh's boots.

Who put them on
my twisted yellow feet?

:

Why waste the food, he says,
waving the tray away.

:

See, there's a miniature dinosaur
in the sidewalk, a winged one, asleep,

a bird in asphalt.

:

After the "little ice age" and Crusades
for three years it rained hard rain: 1315-17 CE,
irrigated the plague.

They blame the dry Jews.

:

Bertha mentions Belle. Your sister is still
with you? she says. No, Betty says.
She has been gone for six years, a long time.
The sit quietly under the Sabbath lights.

Both ninety.

:

Piers and rails and tanks and barges and steam
and shacks and trucks and here and there
a speck with two legs on cement
and 1930 for a sky.

:

It is soon Spring

and trees are still mated
to sidewalk gray ice
inside the woods.

:

On the island after supper
she stepped out and took this picture
lit by the click of her new gift camera
these nightsea stars.

:

A moon perusing the couch
and sweater of heather.

:

Ice doesn't want to give way
but it's done what it can

for the play.

:

Having thermos tea and cookie,
  nearby a squirrel eating lunch
    I hold my tea with both hands
      and leap from bench to bench.

:

:

:

:

"We have so many things to talk about," she says,
after the afternoon
                in the park,
"but there isn't any air," she says.

:

2 men eating lunch on a girder
                35 floors up
talking in the sky and smiling.

:

A blind grandmother binds on her shawl
stands and looks
    toward the platform door.

:

The running watch is closing in
on the stopped clock

Look, now it passes
and for a time es-capes.

:

Poor woman walking in winter
so dim the teeth show in rows
beneath cheek-skin.

:

They called and said,
"Get up and put on your uniform."

So I got up
and had breakfast,

then went back to my body.

:

Oh what nice rolls.
They really give you
your money's worth.

You get rest by sleeping when you are tired
no matter where that is.

You take rest when the need rises,
as mammals do.

:

Geese fly dark in the valley of ashes
looking like a stream.

:

After I was fired I thought about mountains.
Rehired I was angry and
walked around the block.

:

Crown against the windshield
and gold carpaint for a bed
my line is Nowhere River
and shoes rot red.

:

See we've run out of the tunnel.
These weeds touching the train are green,
just like
in the country.

:

This worry attacks my waking,
disabling the robe of the day.

:

A bearded man in the mirror,
seeing his yellowed underwear
and a synagogue burning far.

:

I can't cheer at the opera as in old times
but twist and wrench
against the bindings of my chair.

:

He wrapped his clay statue in his only blanket
and froze to death beside it in Paris 1864.

:

The couple on the West End Line,
her on his shoulder, his shined shoes split,
their little tartan suitcase crumpled
her purse in his lap.

:

This time of year
if the sun is out
there's no better
    weather.

:

He was the pupil of her eye.
That certainly is a pretty plant.
This terrace is worth the rent.
The mind must love the heart.

:

Girl,
holding her hand in her lap like her child.

:

It would have been nice to have the family together,
tuned to the time before we were born.

:

They are sleepy and clean and trusting
the old bridge girders to Brooklyn.

JOHN HEARTFIELD

AIZ/VI 1930–38

Catalogue raisonne of the photomontages published in
Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung and Volks Illustrierte, with text, translations
and notes by David Evans. 524 pages, 247 colorplates

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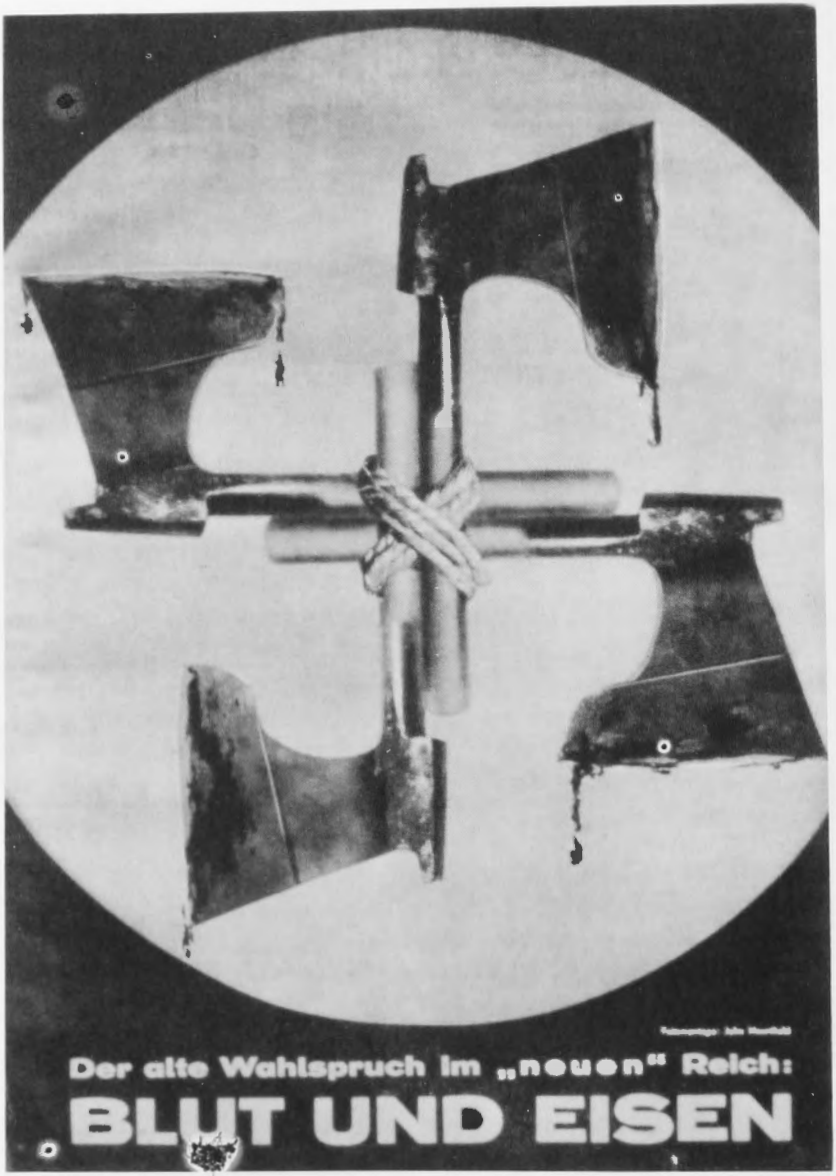
JOHN HEARTFIELD
SIX PHOTOMONTAGES

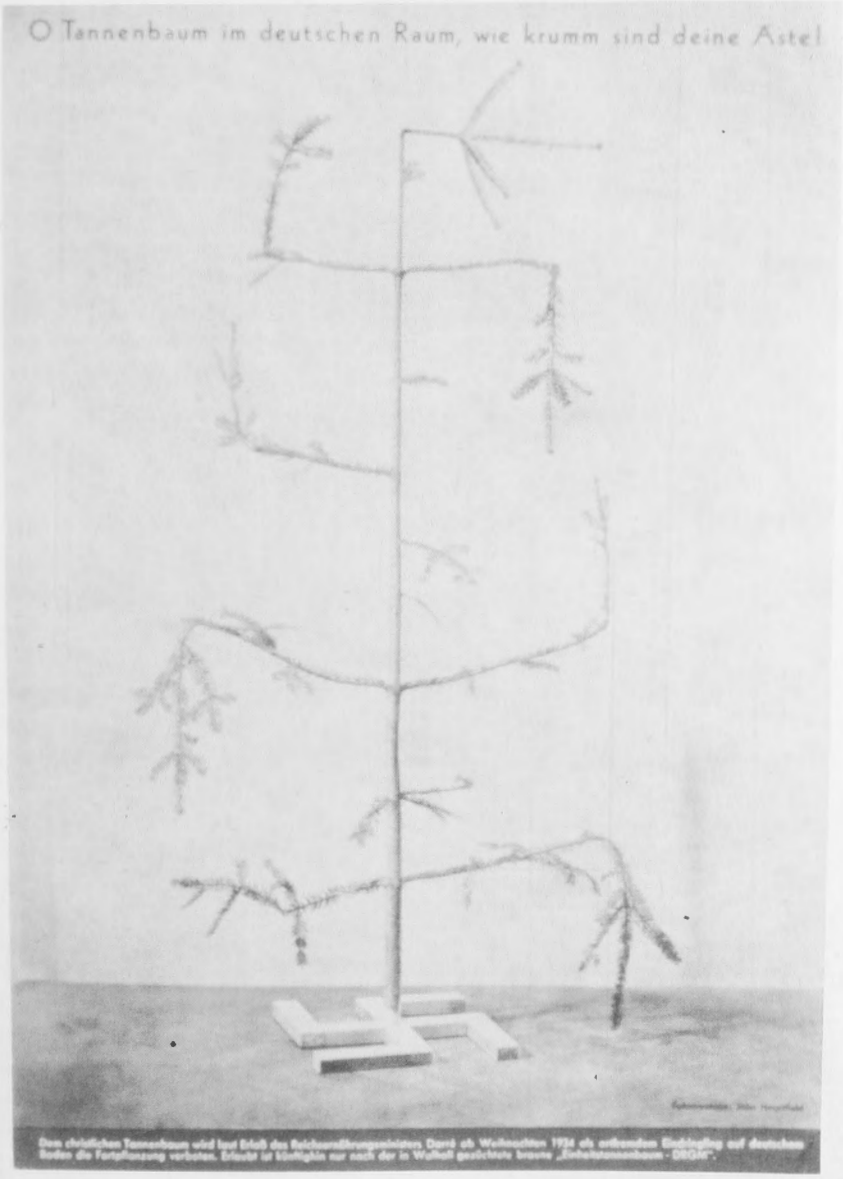
Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ), 1930
WHOEVER READS BOURGEOIS NEWSPAPERS BECOMES BLIND AND DEAF, AWAY WITH THE STULTIFYING BANDAGES!

AIZ, 1931
On the occasion of the crisis party conference of the SPD

AIZ, 1932
THE MEANING OF THE HITLER SALUTE:
Little man asks for big gifts
Motto: MILLIONS STAND BEHIND ME!



AIZ, 1934
The old motto in the "new" Reich:
BLOOD AND IRON



AIZ, 1934
O Christmas tree in German soil, how bent are thy branches!

AIZ, 1936
VOICE FROM THE SWAMP
"Three hundred years of consistent inbreeding prove the superiority of my race!"

ROBERT C. MORGAN
THE SUBVERSIVE WORLD OF JOHN HEARTFIELD

> "A photograph can, by the addition of an unimportant spot of color, become a photomontage, a work of art of a special kind."
>
> —John Heartfield as quoted by Sergey Tretyakov[1]

The climate in Berlin toward the end of the Weimar Republic proved a necessary breeding ground for those artist who identified themselves with the Dada movement. Some of the leading figures associated with Berlin Dada were Richard Huelsenbeck, Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Hoch, Johannes Baader, John Heartfield and George Grosz. Each of these artists developed a point of view that was largely political in its assailment of the failing power structure in Germany. They used non-traditional means of visual (and textural) representation in order to deliver their incisive commentaries. In contrast to the conventional forms and approaches to painting and sculpture being produced at the time, the Dada artists invented media-oriented devices through the deployment of collage, assemblage, typographic arrangement, and photomontage. It was the development of this latter technique that proved to have the most effective reverberations and consequentially the most historical implications in its power to disseminate subversive and oppositional ideas.

Two years before the official birth of Dada in Berlin in 1918, the artists George Grosz and John Heartfield are claimed to have invented photomontage.[2] The spirit of their invention was as much inspired by their radical positions against the Weimar regime as it was by their somewhat witty visual imaginations. It was also during this period that both artists anglicized their names though not officially, as a response to the state-condoned derogation of the British. Heartfield's name was originally Helmut Herzfeld, and Grosz's was originally spelled differently. By adding an "e" to his first name and by changing the last letter of the surname from "s" to "z", the pronunciation of "George Grosz" sounded English.[3] In either

case, the two artists functioned as both aesthetically and politically radical artists at the outset of Berlin Dada, thus giving the content of their respective works an important and necessary moral equivalence.

If Dada was to represent the irrational impulse in culture, as the Dada artists in Zurich had earlier maintained, then it was time by 1920 to extend this aesthetic protest into the realm of current topical issues. This is most clearly stated in the *Collective Dada Manifesto* from that year, authored by a young medical student named Richard Huelsenbeck:

> Art in its execution and direction is dependent on the time in which it lives, and artists are creatures of their epoch. The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash. The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time.[4]

Berlin was the place for this kind of aesthetic or anti-aesthetic to emerge. Political unrest and turmoil filled the streets. Employment was high. There were food and housing shortages. What Huelsenbeck is advocating in his 1920 Manifesto is a rally against Expressionism, claiming that these artists represented "a comfortable life free from content or strife" and that they preferred "their armchair to the noise of the street."[5] The upheavals in Berlin at the end of the First World War were no time for venerating the artist isolated in his atelier, but were signs of another era in which the artist must learn to compete with the propaganda and mediating strategies of the ruling order. It was in such a climate that Heartfield and the photomontage came into prominence.

The concept of the photomontage was not merely about the juxtaposition of "irrational" elements, sandwiched in the same negative, with the subversive inclusion of a slogan, dialogue, or caption, but it was also about the possibility or mass distribution through printing. Though Heartfield had shown his photomontages, both as originals and as printed works in such journals as *Neue Jugend* and later in *Der Dada*, which he publicized through the efforts of his brother Wieland Herzfelde in "Malik Verlag" (Weiland's publishing house), it was not until the late '20s that Heartfield's work achieved wider recognition when he started publishing his montages in the German labor periodical *AIZ* (Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung).[6] It was

in *AIZ* that Heartfield was able to find his most effective measure in counteracting the NAZI-inspired propaganda of the day. The most acrid and satirical photomontages were presented in this journal which had its office in Berlin until Hitler's seizure of power in March 1933. A month later, Heartfield was at home when he heard the jackboots of the German Gestapo coming up the stairs, whereupon he leapt from his window into a haywagon below. He was able to escape from Berlin where he then made his way to Prague. Here he resumed work on his montages against the Socialist Democratic Party until 1938 when he was forced to take exile in England.[7] It is the work done for *AIZ* that has established Heartfield as a major artistic innovator in the history of Modernism.

Heartfield's photomontages play heavily on the absurd. They contain both tragic and comic elements. They suspend oppositional elements in order to incite a visual drama that is clearly unresolvable. The semiotic code between these conflicting signs is not so much concealed as it is revealed. Sometimes Heartfield would appropriate photographs from diverse sources and montage them together to create a particular emotional effect—what Brecht often employed in his dramatic works as a "de-familiarization" effect.[8] This is evident in such works as *The Finest Products of Capitalism*, (1932) where an image of an unemployed man wearing a humiliating placard is placed standing on the "priceless" lace veil of a bridal gown, or *A Pan-German* (1933), in which the image of the Nazi Julius Streicher, editor of the anti-Semitic publication *Der Sturmer*, is placed over an image of a blood-spattered victim on a sidewalk taken from the Stuttgart police file.[9] At the far right of the same montage Heartfield has placed an image of Hitler's representative Rudolf Hess with the caption: "You deserve the dagger. You have surpassed us in assassination." While these examples are the result of combining readymade photographs from various sources and montaging them together, other works by Heartfield are more concerned with a *mise en scene* situation in which the precision of the dramatic sign or incident becomes a major issue. Often these photographs involve a manipulation of the swastika as a still-life motif. Examples include *O Little German Christmas Tree, how bent your branches seem to be* (1934) and *In this sign shall you be betrayed and sold* (1932).

In the latter photograph, Heartfield has taken the traditional Christmas carol, "O Tannenbaum," and given it a subversive visual equivalent. The deliberately spare limbs of the pine tree are manipulated in such a way as to reveal the sign of the swastika. The wry humor of Heartfield—a characteristic that often gives a powerful incisiveness to his montages—is shown at the base of the tree which is, in fact, a swastika. The use of popular slogans as the structure for a visual metaphor is made manifest in yet

another swastika "still-life" called *The old slogan in the "new" Reich: Blood and Iron.* In this case, the Nazi insignia is constructed from four hand-axes, bound in the center with rope, upon which Heartfield has added an effect of blood dripping-off the four blades.

Two of the most famous of the *AIZ* montages (including those shown in *Die Volks-Illustrierte* later in the '30s) were the "tiger montage" or *The Crisis Party Congress of the SPD* (1931) and *Those who read bourgeois newspapers will become deaf and blind* (1930). In the "tiger montage" Heartfield is referring directly to a speech given by Fritz Tarnow, the SPD Reichstag Deputy and Chairman of the Woodworkers Federation, at the Party Congress on June 15, 1931. Heartfield's image of the tiger, montaged over the face of Tarnow, who wears his Nazi-stickpin like a dandy, represents the capitalist betrayal of his proletarian role. This vindictive stance against moral hypocrisy is pervasive throughout the artist's indictments against the SPD.[10] The visual power of this montage is one of Heartfield's strongest.

In *whoever reads bourgeois newspapers*, from the previous year, Heartfield uses a similar approach by taking the three-quarter portrait view of the bust of his anonymous sitter—in this case, a "brown-shirt"—and wrapping the head in two newspapers, each with the logotype visible. The two papers, *Tempo* and *Vorwärts*, were the two ultra-rightist vehicles of the SPD; thus, Heartfield is directly criticizing the journalistic content of how ideology is assumed in "the news" without questioning.

In an exhibition of 234 photomontages by Heartfield at the Kent Gallery in New York last year,[11] visitors were able to assess for themselves the structural and semiotic means that the artist used in order to deliver his critique of the rising Socialist Democratic Party after the fall of the Weimar Republic in Germany. Organized by Anna Lundgren, this exhibition of the *AIZ* and *Die Volks-Illustrierte* montages offered one of the most comprehensive viewings of Heartfield's visualizations of anti-Nazi rhetoric ever seen in the United States. The problem in mounting such an exhibition is that the medium is not precisely suited for viewing on the wall, but for a more intimate viewing on the page. The irony of this viewing experience—as any media analyst can explain—is that the intimacy of the experience is the perfect aura in which to transform political opinion or in which to sell useless products. The intimate space of the media is not really intimate. Nor is it particularly private. Instead, it is a shroud, delivered either by way of print or electronics, that is perfectly convincing. It is convincing because the message is essentially a public one that already presumes, through demographic research, a certain level of social or "cultural" conformism.

The involuntary reception of conformism may appear less threatening given the intentional seduction of the medium.

To put Heartfield on the wall may, in fact, be a means toward demystifying the false intimacy that one automatically feels in responding to the image-text configuration. In this sense, the exhibition succeeded. It made the instrumentalized concept more detached, more a part of history, and more subject to an investigation as to how the means of artistic production was put in the foreground of consciousness. One author refers to Heartfield's strategy as one of "oppositional mimicry" in that Heartfield used the form of the media to subvert its content,[12] a strategy not unrelated to certain martial arts in the East.

Heartfield's late career seems to have brought him a certain degree of recognition. He returned to Germany by way of Prague in 1950 after being exiled in London for most of the war. In 1956 he returned to Berlin after an absence of twenty-three years. Numerous exhibitions began to materialize throughout Germany, Eastern Europe, and the Far East. He died in Berlin in 1968 after several years of severe illness. It is curious that Heartfield's art was largely misunderstood because it was so endemic to the media. Only recently have critics begun to evolve a deconstructive criteria in art that accounts for works that question the pre-eminence of the fetishized object.

NOTES

1 Sergey Tretyakov, "Remarks about Heartfield's Photomontages" in John Heartfield, Photomontages of the Nazi Period (New York: Universe Books, 1977), p. 26

2 Wieland Herzfelde, "Heartfield's Photomontages and Contemporary History" in Heartfield, loc. cit., p. 17

3 *Ibid.*

4 Richard Huelsenbeck, "Collective Dada Manifesto" (1920) in Robert Motherwell, editor, *The Dadda Painters and Poets*, 2nd edition (New York: G. K. Hall, 1981), pp. 242-243

5 *Ibid.*

6 Friedrich Pfafflin, "Heartfield's Photomontages of 1930-38" in Heartfield, loc. cit., pp. 27-29

7 In order to appeal to a wider audience the magazine changed its name in 1936 to *Volks-Illustrierte* or People's Illustrated, a name which it kept until the magazine folded in 1938. (See Exhibition Brochure, "John Heartfield: Photomontages, 1930-38," Kent Gallery, New York, March 30 - May 18, 1991.)

8 The term "de-familiarization" was used by the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, but it also applies to what Brecht refers to as the "A-effect" or alienation effect. (See Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton University Press, 1972, pp. 50–51 and also John Willet, editor, *Brecht on Theatre*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1964, pp. 91-99)

9 Dawn Ades, *Photomontage* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp. 44-45

10 Douglas Kahn, *John Heartfield: Art and Mass Media* (New York: Tanam Press, 1985), pp. 73-104

11 According to Anna Lundgren, organizer of the Kent exhibition, all but three of the 237 photomontages from the magazine were shown. (New York, February 10, 1992)

12 Kahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-126

KARIN LESSING
THE YEAR ZERO

". . .for thought is brief whereas the image is absolute"
—Andrei Tarkovsky

"l'indicible n'est pas tapi dans l'écriture, il est ce qui l'a bien avant déclenché"
—Georges Perec

vein vision swirl

into the wired Darkness

crystal
which most fully embodied dwells at a remove frosted

daughter of Storm

its traceries
playing on the wall
are flames

(seen as flames)

They come
with snow, with wintering

come from the east

They graze among ruins

(their ghost speech, their
unspoken to children

vanishing out of me)

They covered all the mirrors but one

•

"great things have happened
on the earth"

many deaths, motions
in whose wake

we abandon oars, we sink
into lichen stars outskirts peaks

fall further

(images, ash-

grey vermilion)

and the mutter of language comes to a halt.

as even as you do

no longer remember o

mother! Games unravel lives

sweet evergreen
that breath

you take one goose step one

to bring forth, flourish
with branching

A berry!

•••••••••••••••••••

some say
a Sunday home acre and empires

fall (fugitives

the bloom in the wood
shrouds

•

once and for all settles

is white is snow boundary
growing dark

memory is that number

frame and frozen face running together

•

is white neutral, you

say

once and for all annihilation

candescent *"chandelles des rois"*

the signs
burning in us—the storm's—

dip and rise Solitude

the SOLITUDE OF HISTORY

hushed Quietude

your gaze

submits to its power
silently passes

the night on fire fire and fierce
outshining

mute saturates mute Leap mute

• • •

PAUL CHRISTENSEN
THE FIRST DAY

I WENT to sleep and woke up an adolescent. My clothes no longer fit me; they lay on the chair waiting for another person to wear them. But he had died, and would never warm the plaid shirt and red corduroy pants again. I could not bring the word I to my mind without pain. It bruised the insides of my head. I was a larger body without a suitable voice inside it. I cringed from the artificial laughter pouring out of my closet, and the voices whispering against me under the bed. Downstairs, my parents were elderly and feeble, trying to find their mouths with long, sharpened forks. They were eating lukewarm mush from a pot on the table. The walls and floors were covered in a floral-patterned linoleum and the drapes were made of old dresses and pants strung up on laundry lines. The world outside was distant and cold, beginning to break down. The school called to say it would no longer be able to educate me. I went on dressing anyway. I was going on the old habits, the old customs of infancy. My shoes barely fit over my toes, and my shirt cuffs rode up to the elbows, where I managed to fasten them with hair pins. My heart was as big as a washing machine. When I stood at the sink, I felt a weight drop between my legs, and an erection crawl out of my pants to stare at me in the mirror. I combed my black hair into a wave of anger. My mother reached up to my neck to kiss me, but backed off from the musk under my arms. At school nothing was right; all my friends shunned me. A fight broke out behind the workshops and I was suddenly at the center of it, bringing down my fists against someone's upraised face, a boy's, innocent and candid with fear. I grabbed the girl away and went sliding down the corridors on my black shoes, my arm over her neck, my fist dangling between her mohair-covered breasts. I was ready for the dark corners; a killer inside me was looking for a war.

MAXINE CHERNOFF
THREE POEMS

NATURE MORTE

A very sick child
in the Victorian sense.
Nothing specific
about his case.
A vague
longing to seize
his friends,
and arrange them
like wooden
fruit. History,
having ravaged
his metaphors,
reduced him
to a syllable
that spoke
until
the photo
achieved clarity.

THE NORTH SEA

Where I have
never swum,
light as a parlor
losing color.
As pianos register
desire in whole notes,
cold facts warm
to breathing.
Wallpaper begonias
never smelled lovelier
to the naked eye,
scattered
like love
when light registers
dismay
in all the rooms
of the house.

NOT

Sallow March,
lips parted—
and houses show
their dirty faces.
Do we enjoy life?
Life wonders
out loud.
With trepidation
we look at the sky
and arch our curious
spines. If cats
howl in alleys

or cold ailanthus
glares
more cunningly
than hothouse flowers,
we say
that seasons deepen
our frugality.
We give so little
to the rotting grass.
The thinnest air
delivers us
to name
what we hold
rounded
in our hands.
No marimbas here
or sadness passing
like a barge.
Can we say
rebirth
when whole Pyrenees
of silt are
automatic and sublime?
We list our
possible endings,
what's necessary
when the mood for
spring strikes
with insipid,
dire longing.

CONNIE DEANOVICH
THREE POEMS

WATUSI *TITANIC*

an Atlantic Ocean White
dress
hangs in the window
catching a breeze
the way the Atlantic Ocean Goers
in formal dress
hang beautifully underwater
catching seaweed
they tried to catch their breaths
like a Watusi on the basketball court
but they
unlike him
didn't
in
it wouldn't
out
was another matter
there's nothing the matter with thinking
of the
beauty of Watusi genetics and its implication
on the NBA
or with thinking about the
beauty of *Titanic* dead and how this implies
a certain onlyness
in the way "round like a chicken"
implies that chickens are only thought of as dead
and Watusi is thought of only
in the same breath as *jungle*, never *stadium*

and *Titanic* means sunk
Watusi tall

once not sunk but tall
the young *Titanic* shot hoops through frozen white waves
for once not tall but
sunk under warm blue waves
a young Watusi man swims
casting a watery shadow only
a great ghost ship could eclipse

HISTORY AS BOURGEOIS CONSTRUCT

when they lived on
El Burrito Magnifico
and in leopard skin
with bulky buttons

when across the living room
the light of the el
swept swift
as white glove over
dusty mantle

when the wine bar was
Whiskey Heaven

when shirt sleeves
carried the pollen
of quick sex and got
the whole group groping

when oranges were sliced
as the only hors d'oeuvre

when dancing and walking equalled
Life Itself and
reading was done by pink lamp light
emanating from a black ballerina lamp
such an out-of-fashion pursuit
so much the fan
of silent movies and Grant Wood

poor History is now a "bourgeois construct"
running green water into
the red barn
elemental elemental

when things broke down
into elements as ephemeral as black lace at noon

when *Psycho* with its black bra and taxidermy vision
was the mansion for imagination's dirt
imagination must have dirt
black billy clubs walled and lit by an enthusiastic masochist
prayer must be a part for some

when every home entered had a pastel plastic shrine to Jesus

when the man who roams Clark Street
roams it again look
how he looks like he's 80
except for a jet-black pompadour

except that a friend has a compulsion to kiss locks
he's great at a baseball game
remembering is so important

how the opening of a pelican's eye
is reminiscent of the eye
of a creepy little drinking kid

when to the party they brought their kid
and let it eat cat food

when the window opened
onto a brick wall
we called the house Brick View

large flames mean large history
so clouds in the shape of luggage
transport the smoke of
where there's smoke there's
malfunction
dry seas
Marlon Brando tap dancing

anything military ruins anything visionary
anything organized by history
gets the curled lip

when events are dunked
into the neutral milk of history
how hard can it be to say
this came before that
without purposefully smearing the tracks

SILVER NAKEDNESS IN CALUMET CITY

Stark
to eyes sophistically shaded at night
the Candy Shack sign pokes pink light
Big Money Girls Instant Interview
So the powerful peppers on a drunk's tongue
keep him mumbling, like he's eating his lips
I love his confusion

and am proud of it like a darkened
prima donna the way he bumps off cars
like a sea goat
Here, I have purple bottle finger
and a better echo What's left
to do as lightning wets our arms outside
Johnnie's Snack Shop? A girl passes with
"I'm wearing black because my vacation is dead."
And she's in it,
in on the hint Hammond train whistles give
that excitement is occurring
but elsewhere they make me belly-up
and buy that hat otherwise, it's
happenstance tacos from a tavern and
I can't make it in the country
shovels lasting like wedding cake unused
Virginia Plains protects my robust women
with pool sticks
See their shadows and you've seen dedication
I find it everywhere the thundering
dough balls of bygone days
This dead city agrees with the deader sea
it used to be and it's tomahawking through me
tonight until I crave a chili dog from a wagon
that drips through my hand I hear,
"Isn't she a bit of a narrow saint?" and Lizabeth
Scott crooning through her bangs somewhere up high
and this is my signal when the fan turns
Giuseppe Verdi means Joe Green
I try to see
what lakes me sleep
the Indian woman in her sari
swinging on a swing

CARL RAKOSI
THREE POEMS

IN THE POET'S EYE

The tree
and
the rock
are
true
Nordics
in a lingua
oscura,
a hermetic
order
that
can tell
infinity
from
an ass.

DRUNKARD'S ALLEY

What's the time?

One o'crock
as
the clock crows

between
naught
and
sphinx

MINIMAL VILLAGE

a wine shop
a church

between them
an ilex

and a table
underneath

the rest
is commentary

Is that you,
Everyman,
sitting there?

yet of my mind
a quiddity

under the ilex
tree that

loves to laugh
at commentary

SPENCER SELBY
MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

The astonished question cannot superimpose
perfection of reality without prejudice
we worship to delay our own Book of Job.

There is one hell raging against that process,
another for which living is simply not prepared.
One grownup banished from Eden, one childhood

sent on ahead to express true acceptance
of ignorance and death. Sent on ahead while
year day and month carry out silent remarks

in darkness made to blend itself with Western
Dramatic Agency of Doubt. History we don't want
acting more and more like a firework meaning

only worldwide breakthrough possible. Power
and impact meaning other side of warlike conquest
unprepared. Dark distance standing in the doorway

meaning experience that commanded and blew
apart the whole. A vision we were wrong about
is utterly poised and ready for something which

depth and surface can't possibly divide, a brilliant
and dangerous outlook unspeakable in its focus
upon some grand design most recently denied.

Meanwhile crisis of the ordinary overleaps
the source unraveled by its own best interest.
Outstretched falsehood turns barriers and limits

around to face the concluding page of tomorrow's
otherwise unapproachable narrative response.
Experience turns up the volume and soon

discovers what which difficult truth would
laugh no better in the best of all possible worlds.
For just one moment knowing once and for all

which fantasy took the charged rescue always
ignored because too literal. Took it for what it
was and made up all the difference it was worth.

CLARK COOLIDGE
from *TO THE COLD HEART*

After Han Shan

Who controls middle mind
dumb to the bottom of
blood crack hard
but open will light
increase wide dust
head of a beast thinks
these will never end

•

I live in a river
a lot older than the one you
I pretend to lusts
prong thing on that backwall
I used chance but
last night it lifted
now will you bring me the blue bowl
for the new iron ball
that tore and then rested?

•

Grew new eyes in the seat
of rock, of blue rack
advice
amasses cost
and the play fights

back, and the memory
plans collapses

•

Not particular about what
I thought priceless
on
thought set up dull
divined and then stopped again
clouded in sun and relieved
of the mackerel

•

Pendulum of continuous
stripes
production of snaps and clips
diurnal solve in torrid treats
did you score a well for
this speed ground?

•

Yesterday I bought school
and gained a sunset
it was ground in a wheat
sort of cap, deep drug
where we hang
we all go up
the alley in cloud

•

Rode no crane here
riding the fish, a tack
films the lip in lapses
excalibrations for higher sun
here is the winded ground

where one inch of water grows
within a tap of your number

•

In this morning there
conditions, formations
give up the key and follow
the mountain
it hollows in the sun
pretends to turn to stone
the easiest things

•

These worn out clothes go
whole with their former bodies
an apparent match?
I'll float, you go carol
in the dailies

•

Once I saw
the water clear
I took one
solo simply
and of a hue

•

Is it thus carpeted that
we will bear the tread?
unlimbered in hand, svelte of smoke
I raise bonds
I toe the kettles
if it all comes back into
swirly play

•

Complication
dares me stumble
impulse of the fair
detour of the rude
peeked at
the covered in garment
but
oil of the foul rules day

•

Jewel place at elbow body
wed in a rhyme where be
the logs of pleasure, loops
called webs called gainful taunts
I laugh over the elastic of
by gone and held up true binds
elaborations tune
in the waiting airs

•

Breaking out in causes?
water is alphabet long and teems
coil to the brights, echo laughs
transpond, laid out in corners
edge of where the past is named
bulk is strained fine

•

I gazed into the flashlight
barrel of, no spark at end
no barrier for the brighter whims
it's engagement, they say
that or the hard headed jar
one feels

•

Today I did nothing
but stretch the hole
and polish my food
there was a door but
I famished it
the lie at which
I managed to turn
the whole to all
light at lack of night

•

Not being able to stand
taking these things off then on
again I exist, nothing to be said
it's plain, solved, incarcerate
when I think back, when I steal
these lit lines further from the hand
a danced drift banner come unlaced

•

Anymore, in a way
I don't know a thing
there is buried, then is caught
a lump that varies in the grasp
a worry that dies at a hill
place of certain calls
pure death

•

Calcify with cold
then increase the grasp
nothing will howl with thought
enjoined and burst
loose

hard this permission
called to the limit
of the ape his one
pearl on a green shelf

•

No, a mind can't be kept
in front of all light
shadowed by the calcifiers
loading things in here
where only the wheels don't shine
using the moon as a finger
to close the mind

JANET KAUFFMAN

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE

Left to right: Marie, her hair is foamed, she spikes it seaward, east, west, her lips in C-clamps. Antoine, on his side, braced, languished, the sun hits all his fingers, his wooden rings. Margaret and Lavon, the twins, on their knees, their backs turned, each one embraces a thigh of Barret, naked, his chin points up, his neck cartilaged and frail. Lorain in plastene tights splits, perfectly, crotch flat, her smile parallels her legs. Landis crosses his arms, his glass eye balances in the penny-slot of his shoe. Next, the lounge chairs with Darlotta and Lloyd, they are looking at the ground. Then Medallion in her day-dress, lime green, elastic waist and sleeves. Benny, his eyes on the sky, distracted, his penis points up, mushroom-capped, out of the fly flap of silk boxers. Denise with Joe in a neck-hold, his onyx earring, his left ear, marks a point directly under her chin. Renee, dark glasses, coat of mail, nand-forged shoes. Then the guys in suits, red tie, red tie, red tie. Vinnie with the air tank, scuba belt. James holds a crescent platter, the three-toed red maple bonsai, in his lap. Nora in plaster, since she's in Rome. Randolph with the rainforest refugee, Tra, and his mangled arm. Vlaz, who holds the cake, the neon hedge topping. Mbarame and John, a few nicks from the cyclone, arms behind their necks. Jackie and her band, Donna in the Ground, for the occasion, foregoing black for blister red, silver grids on gold sheets, six-foot blue amps. Ling, with the pudding and umbrellas. Andy with the I.V. and open shirt, lips on his bared head, drawn by Laurel, her gloss amethyst. Patsy in transparency, the metal hubs of her hips, the belly pillow very clear. Raphael in purple jacket plaids pressed back-to-back with Anna and Harmusch, who holds the leg of Thom at the knee-band, while Rappaport, leaning, buttresses, his black cords zig-zagged. Rinaldo, open-mouthed, with Adrienne, her face behind her hand, and half-size Nadete, the girl, mud-covered, jeweled. Bill, the boy, sitting on leaves. And Zella, she's the dead one, burned to dust, she could be anywhere.

JULIA BALLERINI

LORNA BIEBER: REPRODUCTIONS

The puckered heads of babies join elongated adult bodies, both stretched like taffy through a multiplicity of reproductions. First there is a grafting, as a head and body from different photographic sources are coupled within a domestic surround. These couplings are then advance in waves and ripples through xeroxed reproductions. The ghoulish progeny of these technological genetics prance, yawn, and scream in the slither of their relocations and duplications.

They inhabit the spaces of the 1940s and '50s affluent suburban interiors and gardens, comfortable, stable spaces now slightly distorted through their technological recall. A figure in tails and a white ruff is triplicated as it performs an elegant little dance next to a daybed. Its puffy head is wrinkled in infant sleep. Amid wall to wall carpeting, French windows, greenery, and a side table with its brass lamp, a kimono stick figure bears the head of an infant sage. A couple have descended a curved stairway. His nose becomes a pig's snout as it is pressed against the glass of its reproductive process. His mouth open wide, he cries. Adults cry like babies over a great loss or pain. Here an infant cries as an adult, a cry before the availability of language, a cry for a state of protection and innocence that he ought to inhabit but has been denied him through an accident of reproductive genetics. An ectoplasmic wisp of chemistry gags the mouth of his companion. In one image an unknown beast has come to prowl a boudoir.

These works tell of the dissolution of borders that are thought to divide many states: states of infancy and adulthood, dreaming and waking, stillness and motion, interior and exterior. They probe deeply those conditions of nostalgic longing and fear as physiological and psychological boundaries dissolve and merge.

These Silverprints by Lorna Bieber were done in 1991-2. All are sized at 30" X 40" and they appear here in the following order:

1) Spare Room 2) Stairs 3) Study 4) Wall 5) Dining Room
6) Hallway 7) Library 8) Dressing Room

LORNA BIEBER
EIGHT REPRODUCTIONS

ANDREA ZANZOTTO
from *IDIOM (IDIOMA)*

(Tr. from the Italian by Beverly Allen)

FAR AWAY

Far away—that's how I saw her face darken
vanish in the unnatural depths of a scarf
in the unnatural fact of a door
and the hours never let me pass
ever again: "It's still too early
to go home from school,
the sun's shining on the rooftops
can you tell the time?"
"It's two o'clock:'
"It's still too early. . ."
"It's three o'clock"
. "It's"
In our not-knowing.
In our reciprocal not knowing
I draw near, cautiously, and I wound
without wounding, I spy without spying,
I reach without reaching.

And today there's the sun born forth from the freezings
about-faces toward the absolute,
sourish
a light, disheartening sting of cold—
marked, open, realities breathed in wind—
but I thin out and crop these icicles or icebergs
I come out of my ugly and am half-way handsome
I find my mother sitting in a dark corner
in the midst of this you would say oceanic blazing
universal yet aimed blazing

just like that dark corner is aimed
I find my mother sitting in a dark corner
murmuring that it's not fair that they're giving
so big a pension to Donna Rachele
while she gets only social security, or
I find her a little exposed to that wind
turned toward the side street
to watch the main-street traffic
to testify to the endless rustle
the cars that Sunday night vomits up once again
We trudge up the lane again and again
we're completely sad-happy happy-sad
we're completely ready and we're staunch losers
we're here and there—where and where?—
in the sunshine and space and frost of a highest intelligence
we're being raked up with whatever else
                is sweetly left over
                but still is a crowded crowd a seeded seed
we accept we accept
we leave, let's,
these words, forever (we leave)

from *"Ancient attempts at false cross-psychotherapies"*

Note:
"It's still too early," etc.: dialect nursery rhyme sung
in nursery schools of times gone by.

I'D LIKE TO KNOW IT

Put away your learned art.
If you want to know where to find good wine,

in which inn or peasant hut
beneath the sign of the bough, just
ask Nene. Eighty five years now mark her calendar.
She lives well and well alone
in her little house in Cal Santa.
I used to write on the Cal Santa walls
—and a mystic's cunning eye can still discern
the worn marks, maybe some such eye will find them soon—
"Nene dictatrice in hoc vico, MCMXXXIX."
This year she redid the ceilings,
last year she painted the shutters,
A Signore called her kitchen "oasis of peace."
She wanted to turn her armchair into a chicken coop
and the flowered staircase into a closet. The alarm clock
in the kitchen has a civil majesty in its tick;
eternity stands watch to its beat
over that terra cotta floor,
among those whitewashed walls,
with the table, the egg and the
good glass of vine.
She criticizes the radio programs.
She goes to bed at seven, now that it's winter
and sunset petrifies the Cal Santa sky. But:
Nene knows where the best wine is.
Her walks get lost behind the hills.
In summertime, she goes about the house in her slip, and once
the chaplain surprised her on his way to collect alms.
We spoke of all this in the great past,
the past that's ours, with the snows
and suns of yesteryear
and the gravel and the diamond-hard grass
where the brothers Apple and Peel, called from fairy tale lands,
kicked their little feet
to distract us when we cried, thanks to Nene.
She'll plaster the house strong, in the future,
she'll modernize, maybe,
the little doorway etcetera that opens onto the yard.
She wakes up at night and recites endless prayers
for whoever—she says—is forgotten

and/or for whoever forgets to pray. Sometimes she sings.
Tapes exist
of her well-modulated "Casta diva,"
it trembles only somewhat. She laughs at herself
a little, but she believes in herself more.
The times of the oasis of peace. Spaces, floors,
objects, sayings. Oh times
that still exist, you thicken and grow rich,
you accumulate sweetly within yourselves—
and even the most minuscule specks of woe
are deleted or dewdropped.
Ah the German fires of '44
Ah the '56 comet in the cold-summery sky
Ah the vanished hen,
the stolen grapes,
the hatchets the bad boys hid.
Ah the egg and the glass of red.
You're afraid? You're afraid?
The eternal is so immediate here, so
tangibly a fruit of time, its quality-bound
gleaming, in such striking conversation.
And every suspicion about things
and appearances is so false. Which never pass by here
just as their causes and perfect reasons never do.

Note:
The wall with the writing on it has been gone for a long time now,
just like the protagonist.

SHEPHERDS

Shepherds, who once were called
"sheep herds,"
who, in poetry, count
more than any other category
because they ruled in Arcady,
might look like animals
if you see them
clumped in all the time with the lambs
goats dogs and horses.
It's not true: they stay men and poets
and kings of Arcadys that no one
will ever discover.

THE BLACKSMITH

The blacksmith in his shop
always scares us some,
the shop's so dense with fire and so dark;
but mostly we're afraid
of him, when he nails
the red-hot irons to the hooves
of donkeys horses and mules:
let him catch a hard kick in the face
the same kick we've always gotten,
just by living, from life.

KNIFE-GRINDER

He grinds and grinds,
so the knife cuts and pokes
so it shines.
Use your head when you use it
for the pork roast on the table.
What a shudder of sparks from the grindstone!
It turns and grinds, grinds and turns,
and finally I get my polenta.

WOMEN WHO SPIN

To spin with spindle and spool
in the low, short days that die out
with our tales unwound in the stalls. . .
To spin for so many hours
and not get paid a thing
because women—everyone knows—don't count.
Hemp, wool and linen,
thick weaves and file weaves
for all the people in our district:
our hours are worth nothing,
nothing, like our evening tales in the stalls. . .

UNTITLED

Deceased-dumbnesses, scattered, stunned names,
swarming over there where it almost glimmers
attracting the sign. . .

But the bone-dry stream,
the one that got this far—how? who knows?—,
leaves some hints of motives alive for you
        in a pool of water under a few rocks
And—I say it in the softest
        assumption of a confiding whisper—
know this: that stream is the immortal sky
know this: Apollo
takes great liberties in that pool
in its laying back/trance—even if it doesn't exist—
he takes great liberties; and not one atom
of his thousands of possible vocal chords
leads to betrayal.
By using the dirtiest and highest fiction,
he imprints the only possible statement.
There's a blue of hopes and yearnings
ia the puddle-sieve. Even one of my own justifications
comes from that,
my irremediable "I" stepped out,
lazily undid the ιδιον from the ιδιωμα.
and was dragged off (it seems)
toward poetry's crib-death jousts.
        Oh yes, dragged off
        like the leaf that's shrivelled
        but dear to the sweeper, who's a good collector
        and who lies in wait
        behind the wrong-way sign
        having had enough of flaying his
        (not at all sure of winning) competitors.
        He loves them instead, He,
        loves—in a crumpled-up paper
        and in no value system

gathered together—
gathered by the valley wild

Note:
In memory of Filippo Maria Pontani. The graphic sign is the wrong way sign. The "ιδιον" of the "ιδιωμα": the "proper" [or "own"] in "property" and "property-language." Cfr. Zanzotto's note on the title.

ANOTHER, ANOTHER LANGUAGE, PAST IDIOM?

Languages blossom beckon
take to the woods and turn on us in a thousand
needles of dumbnesses and deafnesses
they sink and sharpen in many and many more idiots
Languages whose tricks we vainly
think we can avoid—tricks blooming, reeking with
tastes and smells, but they're an idiocy.
An idiom, nothing else, is what traverses me
in assaults and pantings: *h j k ch ch ch*
an idiom
is the plastered gesture
that accumulates
evenings scissored away toward nothingness. But
from cruelly smashed rocks among
teeth that make diamonds, in
drunken liquors the idioms seem to come!
Each one as a residue of itself, of
I-language, now mere seduction!
But look how—in an idiom—the world's own enchanted fog
runs the most horrible risks, a storehouse
of all ecstatic choices, of all loyalties

And that's where I slouch to, the untranslatable why
past-idiom, the here, the right away,
the pulsing closed circuit,
the clot, the cycle of blips on a monitor.
Let there be no idioms, or translations, now
within the scattered
tightlywound inner self-undoing
of this returning attack of autumn.
"Attack," "translations," what did I say? Or
other ever more nervously adapted synonyms:
h j k ch ch ch, in other idioms?
But what do I care now about idioms?
But yes, I do, I do care about
same little poem that doesn't want to know about idioms
but still lives and dies there—that's what I care about,
and about the sheet of paper
stolen forever from the windy
darkness of some ValPiave
truly definitively
Canadian or Australian
or beyond.

This collection of verses is part of a group including Il galateo in bosco [the woodland book of manners] and Fosfeni [phosphenes]. Part of this collection is from the same time period as those books (1975-1982), while some compositions here date from 1983-84. The three books together make up a kind of pseudo-trilogy: they are non-chronological moments of a single work, moments that refer back and forth to each other regardless of the book in which they occur, with a certain discontinuity and even reciprocal disavowal.

Idiom: to be understood according to all possible etymological scatterings and beyond, from the fullness of nascent, incoercible speech as an entirely unique blossoming to the opposite pole of closure within a particularity through which we arrive at the heading, "idiocy." Language, private language, private and depriving fact; an excess of privacy and therefore of closure-privation-deprivation. An emphasis on particularity: but also, on the contrary, a linguistic tool entirely bent on overflowing and getting beyond that particularity.

—A.Z.

ALLEN GINSBERG
WHITMAN'S INFLUENCE: A MOUNTAIN TOO VAST TO BE SEEN

Like Poe, Whitman's breakthru from official conventional nationalist identity to personal self, to subject, subjectivity, to Candor of Person, sacredness of the unique eccentric curious solitary personal consciousness changed written imaginative conception of the individual around the whole world, and inspired a democratic revolution of mental nature from Leningrad & Paris to Shanghai & Tokyo.

Like Poe, who introduced modern self-consciousness to Baudelaire & Dostoyevsky, so Whitman's exposure of a new self of man and woman empowered every particular soul who heard his long breathed inspiration, "I celebrate myself, & sing myself / And what I assume you shall assume . . ."

This expansive person & expanded verse line affected continental Literary consciousness by the turn of the century, Emile Verhaeren in Belgian French, Paul Claudel later with extended strophic verse. The Russian Futurists adapted Whitman's bold Personism—vide Mayakovsky's *Cloud in Trousers,* Blok's *The Twelve,* Khlebnikoff's vocal experimentation. Perhaps thru the French, Japanese and Chinese poets reinvented verse forms and personality of poet—Kuo Mo-Jo & Ai Qing particularly, introduced Whitmanic afflatus and expanded verse line to China by 1919. And E. Pound also said, "I make a pact with you Walt Whitman" in introducing modernism to American English poetry by World War I—thereby catalyzing renewal of all world poetries. What was Whitman's effect on Italian Futurists? On Marinetti & Ungaretti?

In *Democratic Vistas* Whitman warned that unless American materialism were to be enlightened by some spiritual influence, the United States would turn into "the fabled damned of nations." His spiritual medicine or antidote to poisonous materialism was "adhesiveness," a generous affection between citizens. In his preface to *Leaves of Grass* he prescribed "candor" as the necessary virtue of "poets and orators to come."

The Good Grey Poet's own affection and candor led to the excellent tender erotic verse in the "Calamus" section of *Leaves,* prophesying a gay liberation for American and world literature.

His "Passage to India" predicted a meeting of Eastern and Western thought in our XX Century, a pragmatic transcendentalism that's come true with the flavor of meditation practice in American poetry as we approach the second millennium's end.

His image of universal transitoriness in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" has transmitted itself across a century. As the Tibetan Lama, the Ven. Chōgyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, remarked, Whitman's writing equals Buddhist Sutras in this perception.

"When Lilacs last in Dooryard Bloomed," his threnody for Lincoln, salutes Death with romantic vigor equal to his salutation to Life, "Salut au Monde."

And his "Sands at Seventy," "Good-By My Fancy" and "Old Age Echoes" are marvelous short poems of old age, describing with equanimity the "querilities. . .constipation. . .whimpering ennui" of body and mind approaching death, signaling farewell, waving good-bye, "garrulous to the very last." These later lesser known poems are among his most vividly appealing, and prefigure the brief clear-eyed sketches of his poetic grandchildren the Imagist and Objectivist poets W.C. Williams & Charles Reznikoff. Such poems serve as candid models for my own verse to this day.

1/28/92 Milan

News In Briefs

Two years ago *Sulfur* 27 featured a section, edited by Roderick Iverson, on the East Berlin poets in the bohemian Prenzlauer Berg scene. The poet most quoted by Iverson, and the one who opens the section, was Rainer Schedlinski (b. 1956), the editor of a samisdat magazine called *ariadnefabrik*. Iverson speaks of attending an underground reading by Schedlinski and others, and describes the discussions that followed as "being voiced with astonishing moral anger." He cites Schedlinski at length on the poet's need to counter the prevailing enforced silence and self-censorship, and sits with the poet in a former literary hang-out as he laments the defection to the West of many of his friends. Iverson ends the first part of his essay with the collapse of the Wall, and this quote from Schedlinski: "The person who knows how things will proceed from here is a person who is not completely informed. . ."

That last word has taken on an eerie resonance, for it turns out that throughout the years of the Prenzlauer Berg scene, Schedlinski was a regular, paid informant for the Stasi, the East German secret police. Schedlinski, according to the recently opened Stasi files, sent frequent reports on all his friends: the parties and literary events they attended, the local gossip, off-hand remarks, and so on. At least one poet was, on the basis of this information, arrested.

Schedlinski was hardly alone. Another Stasi employee was Sascha Anderson, a poet and general impresario of the scene—organizer of art shows, rock concerts, magazines, presses, and legendary parties. (Anderson and Schedlinski, though close friends, were probably unaware of each other's secret life.) And from the galactic size of the Stasi files, it is estimated that one out of every fifty East Germans was an informer, including husbands and wives, parents and children reporting on each other. Over 600 friends and acquaintances of the novelist Christa Wolf sent in reports.

There is also the theory, advanced by the poet Wolf Biermann, that the Prenzlauer Berg scene was actively encouraged by the Stasi—that after the highly emotional, political, and accessible poetry of Biermann and his

generation (all expelled to the West), the secret police welcomed the endless essays couched in deconstructionist jargon and the kind of poems where, in Schedlinski's words in *Sulfur*, language is "dismantled into the smallest mnemonic unities which [are] mutually purged from the text," or where "one word destroys the one next to it." (Not surprisingly, the Prenzlauer Berg story has curious loops back to the Paul de Man case.)

And another loop: in that same issue of *Sulfur*, responding to my attack on the NEA (as having bought the silence of the artists and writers during the Reagan years), Clayton Eshleman writes: "I've given up on trying to make a connection between source of income and quality of artistic production," that "capable imaginations will do their work" regardless. Many would agree, but it's worth noting that Rainer Schedlinski now claims that the only reason he worked as an informer was to pay for his magazine: "I had no scruples about that. I thought, if the Stasi want to finance the underground—fine."

[Schedlinski and Anderson, meanwhile, have formed a publishing company called Galrev, and Schedlinski has, like most victims and perpetrators these days, made a career of telling his story, in European magazines and on television, and on a lecture tour of the U.S.]

* * *

Nathaniel Mackey's *Hambone* is the main meeting-place for Third World, American minority and white avant-gardists. It is one of the two or three poetry magazines that is always worth reading. The latest issue (#10) features an 80-page poem, "Trench Town Rock," by the Barbadoan poet Kamau Brathwaite, on the violence in Kingston, Jamaica, where he lives. Combining the Dos Passos "camera eye," newspaper clippings, transcripts of radio talk shows, lyric passages, an African folk tale, and a computer-generated typographical montage, it is the kind of knock-down political poem not seen in these parts for twenty years. *(Hambone,* 134 Hunolt Street, Santa Cruz CA 95060.)

Brathwaite strangely, or not so strangely, remains little known in the U.S. (In the Caribbean he is William Carlos Williams to Derek Walcott's T.S. Eliot.) His second trilogy *(Mother Poem, Sun Poem, X/Self)* is even better than the first *(The Arrivants)*—all four books are published by Oxford—and the first volume of the third trilogy, *Middle Passages,* is forthcoming from Bloodaxe in England. (No U.S. publisher.) He is the great chronicler and singer of the African diaspora, and one whose formal inventiveness keeps him forever moving. Even more, it is a glimpse of the territories poetry has yet to stake out.

* * *

The Chinese poets of the "Obscure" or "Misty" group were the aesthetic vanguard of the student uprisings of the 1970s and 80s—their poems playing a role quite similar to that of rock music in the U.S. in the 1960s. Since the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, nearly all of these poets are in exile, and their work is starting to appear in English—though often in translations that require some reader participation in the creation of the text.

Their early work, where they rejected socialist realism in favor of highly subjective lyrics and an independently-invented Imagism, is best represented by the North Point anthology, *A Splintered Mirror,* translated by Donald Finkel and Carolyn Kizer. Since then, each of the poets has been moving in a different direction, and all their books are worth tracking down. Bei Dao's early poems are in *The August Sleepwalker;* the recent work, written in exile in various Northern European countries and full of haunting images that are simultaneously simple and nearly impenetrable, is in *Old Snow* (both New Directions, both translated by Bonnie McDougall). Duo Duo is the most political, surrealist and emotionally charged in the group; his work is in *Looking Out From Death,* translated by Gregory Lee, published in England by Bloomsbury and barely available here. Gu Cheng has the humor and exuberance of the early European modernists; his "Bulin" poems are eccentric cousins to Rothenberg's Coyote and Cokboy (which he's never read). His *Selected Poems* (various translators), published in Hong Kong by Renditions, is distributed by SPD in Berkeley (which also has the excellent *Renditions* magazine of classical and contemporary Chinese literature in translation). Yang Lian's major work, a 300–page philosophical poem whose title is an invented character pronounced *I* (as in *I Ching)* has yet to be translated. Meanwhile, two sets of six-line poems are in *Masks & Crocodile,* translated by Mabel Lee with an interesting long introduction. Published by Canterbury Press, Unit 2, 71 Rushdale St., Scoresby, Victoria 3179, Australia.

Since 1989, Bei Dao has been living in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Germany, and has resurrected his magazine from the 1970s, *Jintian* (Today), for the writers in exile. He is separated from his wife and child, who have not been permitted to leave China. Duo Duo has been living in England, Canada and Holland. Gu Cheng, a disciple of Chuang Tzu, has been living on a tiny island off New Zealand, sometimes subsisting on roots and berries. Yang Lian has been in Australia and New Zealand, Berlin and New York. In Aarhus, Denmark, Bei Dao writes that he speaks Chinese to the mirror. Yang Lian writes that the only ones who don't believe words are the poets.

* * *

For decades Garcia Lorca's nephew deemed all English translations inadequate and refused to grant permission for any new publications. Thus, other than a few samisdat editions like the Blackburn or Spicer, Lorca's poetry languished here for 30 years, represented only by the slim New Directions *Selected* and the monstrous Ben Belitt *Poet in New York.* Finally, in the mid-1980s, as the early work was entering public domain and the family was losing control, the nephew appointed the leading Lorca scholar, Christopher Maurer, as the American editor. Maurer assigned *Poet in New York* to two mellow dudes from Oregon who'd never seen the Manhattan skyline, let alone the stoops of Harlem. (OK OK OK—you don't have to, but it helps. Especially when the tone is metropolitan freak-out.) The result, though infinitely superior to Belitt, was Lorca APRed, laundered and pressed—and, by the way, no better or worse than the five or six manuscripts of the complete text, rejected by the nephew, that I happened to see over the years.

Now Farrar Straus & Giroux has finally published the long-delayed *Collected Poems*, edited by Maurer. At 900 pages, it's a great ball of dough with a diamond inside. A beautiful book, and an authoritative edition of the Spanish texts: virtually the complete poetry (except *Poet in New York);* good intro, excellent notes. But there's gloomy weather on the recto: Maurer has chosen to ignore the many existing published and unpublished translations in favor of entirely new versions. Not necessarily a terrible idea. But he has also, with one exception, equally ignored all the American and English poets—from every possible poetic camp—who occasionally translate Spanish and could have collaborated, and instead given the work to "colleagues" in the Spanish Department, some of them graduate students. What they've produced is hundreds of pages of "Green oh how I love you green" and "No, I refuse to see it!": D.O.A. English that is generally, but not even always, semantically correct.

The one poet in this faculty lounge is Jerome Rothenberg, and his versions of the recently discovered *Suites* is a 250-page section that ejects itself from the rest of the book, and should have been published separately. In Spanish this may not be Lorca at his deepest song, but it is by far the wittiest, most inventive, above all, most musical Lorca in English ever. A tour de force, and a pity we have to pay $50 to hear it.

* * *

If you don't have one of the samisdat copies of *80 Flowers,* it has finally been published in available, though expensive, form in the *Complete Short Poetry of Louis Zukofsky* (Johns Hopkins). Otherwise the title is a misnomer

and the book a bummer. It essentially reprints the Norton *All,* but does not include the many poems which appeared in magazines and were never reprinted, nor any unpublished material. There are no textual notes. The Catullus is included, but without the Latin facing it, as in the original Cape Goliard/Grossman edition, taking away exactly half the fun. No editor is listed, and for good reason.

The Zukofsky book is further evidence of how badly the American moderns have been neglected by the scholars. (Compare the treatment any Dead French Man gets.) Out past the Litz/MacGowan Williams, the Butterick Olson, the Cooney Reznikoff, early Pound, and H.D. (to 1944) the landscape is desolate. It is mind-blowing that there's no complete poetry of Stevens, or Langston Hughes, not even of Frost. Incredible that there's no scholarly edition of Eliot's poetry (the scurrilous poems have never been published) and that there are volumes to be done of his uncollected prose. The Niedecker and Loy are well-known disasters. The *Cantos* keep changing with every reprint. Moore and Oppen, especially, need editions with all the variants (and Oppen a gathering of his extraordinary notes to himself). Other than Pound, there are very few collections of letters. Rexroth and Spicer and postwar H.D. and Olson's prose need to be put together. . .The list is endless. Once upon a time the academy used to give us text, not merely its explication.

* * *

Up there in Prize World, the rule is: when in doubt, tap Mona Van Duyn. She rhymes, she's easy to read, she's cheerful, she's a she, and best of all, a she who writes about how much she loves her hub. Her best-known poem, quoted in every press account every time she wins something, reads in its entirety: "I sometimes think the world's perverse / But then again it could be worse." The humor of this escapes me, but it does retrospectively elevate Ogden Nash to a Karl Kraus-dom of corrosive satire.

Van Duyn has just been crowned our new Poet Laureate, joining the august ranks of Wilbur, Eberhart, Nemerov, Strand and Brodsky. Well so what. But there are a few interesting things about our Laureates. One is that they are all openly heterosexual: certain same-sex epicures in the Establishment have quite obviously been passed over. Two is that, except for Brodsky (a card-carrying anti-communist) they have never, in their careers, expressed any political opinions. (Brodsky, even before he was crowned, used to attend black-tie dinners at the Reagan White House, no doubt fervently discussing Hardy and melancholia over the koho salmon quenelles with Sylvester Stallone and Jerry Falwell.) Three is the real scandal: Throughout the years of the NEA debate and the assaults on art and speech by Senator Helms & ilk, not one of the reigning Poets—Nemerov, Strand,

or Brodsky—used his position to publicly rise in defense of literature and free expression. They were all happy campers in the Bush/Quayle administration, abiding by the first principle of their selection: poets who make nothing happen.

—Eliot Weinberger

Michael Gizzi, *Continental Harmony* (New York: Roof Books, 1991), $8.95

Michael Gizzi would have a quick answer for anyone naive enough to ask how he came to be such a "akomplisht Amurican poet." His poem "Technique" lays the method bare:

> Sat a spell.
> Broke out my pad and penned a few
> ventriloquist dances fast and wild
> as lightning in fascination.

This is just one of Gizzi's recipes for "stealing Mom's apple pie at fax speed." His speakers could hold their own in a tall-tale contest with any of the Faulkner clan and might even win a showdown with one of Flannery O'Connor's aphorism-delivering sentence manglers. The Continental Harmony of these syncopated poems draws its strength from a trove of Kodacolor realism both visual and verbal:

> Zoom cam to memory mote. Me and Pa
> At the Twin Drive-In
> Studs of the cinema steed
> Parked car like palfrey, canted
> Me more a Wamba than a Wilfred in my Dr D's
> Brain-pan broken on Latin and gridiron.

No sound bites for these sound-crazed speakers. Language will do, revved up by Gizzi's "acoustic spurs."

Allen Grossman, *The Ether Dome and Other Poems: New and Selected 1979-1991* (New York: New Directions, 1991) $10.95

Allen Grossman's most recent poems, presented in the first section of this collection under the title "Pastorals of Our Other Hours in the Millennium," plunge his reader into an ageless, mythic world. The jive speaker of "The Piano Player Explains Himself" rises from the dead to entertain the mourners at his funeral and then relishes their bewilderment without once losing sight of his intention to produce an elegy for the poet as singer.

These poems echo Grossman's earlier work, evoking as well his natural and poetic ancestors: "Sexual nuance of the blown seed in the plumed / Shadow. . ." Life and death intermingle here, as do Jewish ancestry and Greek mythology. In "Poland of Death," Parts I-V, dead parents refuse the ostracism of the grave and a son's easy assurances. The father uses a rusty nail to scratch his way past the keepers of the graves and back to the Poland of Death, his makeshift sword refusing the superiority of the pen. The mother, even beyond the grave, remains "incapable of death."

In "The Ether Dome," an autumnal American is haunted by burning factories and encumbered by a body obstructing the path of the Public Garden. Grossman would "read the book of pain / Backward toward the beginning, a thousand years." What he finds along the way is "the sad Miami of the soul," a vaudevillian dance in which Wallis Simpson and Edward VIII share the stage with common shepherds and with Jacob and his angel, none of these quite managing to dominate "the Regulators of the World. . .War, Poetry, Law, Religion." The angelic choruses of this jumbled universe bring no more reassurance than "the hieroglyphic. . .written and erased." Even its shepherds have lost the trail of their common song.

These are poems of ritual passage in which Grossman extends the range of his earlier work by forcing wit toward nonsense. Strains of Coleridge, Yeats, Dylan Thomas and Wallace Stevens nurture the desert waterfall of this profane and haunting music.

Daumal, René, *The Powers of the Word*, Translated and Edited by Mark Polizzotti, Illustrated—five black and white photographs (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991) $12.50

In his attempt to establish René Daumal as a "major thinker" and thereby rescue him from the overwhelming shadow of André Breton, Mark

Polizzotti adopts Daumal's antipathetic attitude toward the "extravagance and self-promoting polemics" of Surrealism and attempts to take Daumal's argument one step further. Unabashedly apostolic, Polizzotti's introduction to his translations of the Essays and Notes offers a welcome overview not only of Daumal's tormented life but of the intellectual and spiritual turmoil which nourished his iconoclastic yet timeless theories of poetry and language. The twenty-two essays which appear here, most of them for the first time in English, justify Polizzotti's decision to draw this volume's title from Daumal's essay on Hindu poetics. The indirection of Eastern mysticism reinforces Daumal's innate respect for precision as he attempts to define the limits not only of figurative language but of the creative act itself.

Daumal's essay entitled "On the Attitude of Criticism with Respect to Poetry" might serve as a corrective to today's internecine critical warfare. While flaunting his inability to pronounce the word *criticism* "other than with a grimace of disgust," Daumal refuses diatribe in favor of a patrician attack on flaccid attempts at "vague approval" and a reasoned proposal for a corrective. True criticism would recognize the metaphysical, the scandalous, the flesh-and-blood of a poet—"real thought that frightens the rooted man."

"Poetry Black, Poetry White" surprises by its humility and its simplicity. If a "black" poet abuses his gift by becoming its mindless slave or exploiting it for personal satisfaction, Daumal would resist the temptations of "intellectual scheming" so as to put his efforts at the service of the "luminous seed" of inspiration.

—Taffy Martin

Blood Relations: Menstruation and the Origins of Culture. Chris Knight. Yale University Press, 581 pp., $45.00, 1991.

Call them the shores of Eden—the East African Rift Valley's northerly end, the Afar Triangle in particular. There, among the lakes, rivers and marine shores, Black Eve is learning the secrets of the Serpent, specifically the skill of synchronous ovulation. This is the way the women achieve a solidarity which breaks the rule of the Alpha-male, who can hardly retain his competitive dominance if all the women are fertile at any one time. Now

the softer males get a chance and their less aggressive genetic material can be added to the gene-pool: "The human revolution was pioneered by females who combined pair-bonding with intensified gender solidarity, so that sexual attachments were not at the expense of wider forms of connectedness." Once Black Eve and her sisters have their sexuality under communal control, they can use it in the same way as any other producer of essential goods. It can be traded, and if the goods she needs are not forthcoming—in this case meat for cooking—then she has gained the power to strike.

And strike she does, once a month, a fortnight after ovulation. When she is menstruating she will form a "sexual picket line" because the human being is now unique among primates. Non-human primates signal a "yes" with oestrus body-talk against an otherwise continuous background of "no," while these human beings will not signal collectively with their menstrual blood a "no," against a continuous and exciting possibility of "yes."

This turns out to be the machinery of sublimation which creates culture. The women will allow sex only at the fertile time. At the menstrual time the overlaid "no" will allow the background of "yes" to create its possibilities, flirtations, rites, dances, body-ornamentation, chanting at the dark of the moon. There will be a space engineered in which the creativity of non-penetrative sex is displayed in its riches. The men, who are otherwise likely to structure their lives on the continuous sexual availability of the women, are immersed in an erotic field without marital consummation: ". . .what is important is the normal *marital* relations should be prohibited and delayed; any sex which occurs to mark the onset of the strike period may arouse desire but should be wholly under female control; it should also be non-consummated, non-penetrative, infertile and/or merely acted out in play."

The marital consummation is delayed until the men in exchange bring the food. Now the moon is waxing and its light oversees their hunt, and they go out with a purpose figured and stimulated by the women's celebratory refusal. Nor may any man eat his own kill. That would be to behave like an animal again and the women have established that the blood of the kill is menstrual blood also which says "no." The women, to maximize this structure, watch out for strike-breakers; and the structure itself, the solidarity, the moon-synchrony, is known by the name of the oldest image of divinity to survive in an unbroken tradition from 7,000 years ago to the present time: the Rainbow Snake.

The ovulation-synchrony may first have been perceived as a possibility in female bodily-awareness in the snaky moon-synchronized tidal waters of the East African Eden. When the developed system spread, it caught hold in societies all over the world. In areas less influenced by tides, the women would have used "massage, sweating, ritual bathing, dance, night-long

firelight and moon-scheduled celebratory sexual intercourse to augment any effects that nature's weakened clocks on their own might have had." The moon too is the serpent, and the dance in which the women are carried up to heaven—perhaps the image for the trance-condition in which the menstrual cycle can be regulated (one of the few references to menstruation in Freud is how he reset a female patient's cycle like a watch by hypnosis). The dance is the snake that is brought out by menstruation and is at the same time the cause of menstruation. The Snake is the name of the complete shared subjectivity of women:

> . . .shoreline-foraging Aboriginal women from earliest times phase locked with the tides, and correspondingly conceptualized themselves as immersed once a month in a "flood" of blood-symbolized togetherness transcending the individuality of each participant. In their monthly menstrual immersion or sex strike. . . . the participants would have felt their separate identities being transcended in that of the great kinship coalition which together they formed. . . In principle, it would only have needed two females—perhaps sisters, perhaps mother and daughter—to have set in train the movement towards culture as an unstoppable force. If these two always backed each other up, always acted in concert, synchronized their menstrual cycles and were able to motivate two or more males to hunt for them by making sex dependent on it, then they might have been so much more successful in securing meat than other females in the population. . .

And what of the men, raised by the women's actions into some greater clarity. Well, the men stole it all, and knew that they were stealing it. Eventually they would invent their own menstrual rites, with false menstrual blood taken from subincision, with ritual in which the whole body was painted with ochre or blood in order to mimic a menstruating womb: "In being enveloped with a coating of blood, the men are being swallowed by the snake." Thus the men created their own symbolic culture. But it was a culture of bad faith, of symbols without substance. It is the culture we inhabit. The true originators and source of authentic moon-blood were displaced, their solidarity denied and prevented, their menstrual rites broken into, their legends subverted, the women: ". . .prevented from experiencing their reproductive powers as sources of collectivity or strength. . .oppressed by and made to fear the consequences of their own extraordinary potential of synchrony and ritual strength." If such important matters as menstruation were left to the women, said the men, then the Snake would overwhelm and destroy the world in uncontrollable floods. Yet, though men did rob the women of their synchrony with each other and with nature, there *are* still certain physiological cycles of men that tend

to become synchronized with the women's menstrual cycle. This means that men might share in this revolution; even though they do not have the body-clock with precisely the correct average phase-length to enable lunar/tidal synchrony to be maintained, they could harmonize with the women (even though ". . .male order embodies no special creativity"), and thus open up for themselves the unity with nature that the earliest cultural women must have felt as "the power in their own bodies to be intimately connected with all wider processes of cyclical renewal."

> In this scheme of things, human and natural cycles of renewal are mutually supportive and sustainable through the same rites. The skies and the landscape are felt to beat to human rhythms. Everything natural, in other words, is conceptualized in human terms, just as everything human is thought to be governed by natural rhythms. . .This is how things felt—because, given synchrony and therefore a shared life-pulse, this was at a deep level how they were.

This transcends the austerities of *Iron John* with a revolutionary schema based on an actuality too physical and an allegiance too foreign for many men at the present time. Whatever is at the core of male initiation, "all the dreaming business came out of women" and Robert Bly's book, which refuses to touch on "female initiation" misses the creation of rhythmic man. Iron John himself, who is found at the bottom of a pond and is covered with red hair, may be an avatar of the Rainbow Serpent. Even though masculinist mythology "became established only through replacement of its female counterpart," still "if ritual traditions have been preserved across the millennia, this is thanks not only to women's own commitment but also to the extraordinary resolve of initiated men who knew the immensity of the responsibilities placed upon them."

Chris Knight in his book has this "extraordinary resolve." It is an immense work of documentation and close argument. My brief and incomplete paraphrase does not communicate the fact that for all its obvious risks the model offers no hypothesis which is not rigorously testable. Not only this, but it appears to solve most of the outstanding conundrums in contemporary anthropology. It does this by approaching directly matters that have hitherto been avoided, indeed tabooed, by accepting the hypothesis that the human menstrual cycle has not only a structure but a function. This is the central affirmation presented in a way which, I repeat, is rigorously testable; but Chris Knight also offers rational solutions of the incest taboo, the prevalence of Stone Age figurines, the widespread use of ochre for ritual purposes, and makes final sense of Levi-Strauss's four great books which, on Dr. Knight's showing, avoided their inevitable conclusion. He says of the awareness of these early cultures of

their own power, imaged in the Rainbow Serpent and its nexus of references, that it was

> collective—and therefore many-headed. It was an immense alliance—and therefore stretched, snakelike, across the landscape. It was dependent on the periodic flowing of blood—and therefore seemed bloodthirsty in its appetites. It involved the harmonization of menstruation with the periodicity of the moon—and so was experienced as cosmic, umbilical, birth-giving, astrological. Its potency was inseparable from the awesome cyclical alternation between opposite light and dark, marital and kinship, cooked and raw, fire and blood . . .

As to whether the human organism spontaneously varies in its metabolisms with the moon, the statistical evidence is quite noisy, but, as Penelope Shuttle and I said in *The Wise Wound* (1978) it matters less whether a woman's cycle is influenced by the moon than that she is able to elect that it should be so influenced in Dr. Knight's words: ". . .at the culminating point of the hominising process, there was glimpsed the possibility of a harmonious social and ecological logic linking menstrual cycles with the periodicity of hunting expeditions, maternal blood with the blood of game animals, cooking and feasting with sexual enjoyment—and all these with the periodicity of the moon." Dr. Knight's great feat is to show the *consistency* with which the legends and tribal lore and customs support the model of how true humanity began in some exquisite discovery of an inner time which was identical with the moon's time. Shuttle and I hypothesize that this could have been in the pang of menstruation at the new moon, or when it rose with the sun rather than riding the night skies; Dr. Knight believes, rather, that the great lunar *Zeitgeber* acts on the follicular stage of preovulation rather than the late luteal phase. Who shall say which is the more sensitive to outer influences until this matter has been investigated by contemporary women, together with all the other work that is still outstanding because the cycle is female? Dr. Knight remarks that there is as yet no account of symbolism in the menstrual cycle, but in fact this symbolism is being written and rewritten nightly in the dreams of women passing through the menstrual cycle. This can be demonstrated by anybody who troubles to record her dreams and relate them to the meaning of the two great culminations of ovulation and menstruation. Indeed this work of dream and image may have been the very sensitivity which reached out for lunar synchrony in the earliest women, and may indeed by the work of women artists and scientists be the foundation of a new and revolutionary culture of women.

—Peter Redgrove

Pierre Joris. *Turbulence*, 1991. St. Lazire Press, Patten Road, Rhinebeck, NY 12572. $8.

The poets for whom World War II and the appearance of atomic weapons were first facts of consciousness have not been ambitious. The idea of a career in poetry, so exemplary in the work of Robert Duncan or Denise Levertov, as much as we admired them, seemed for us, I think, an impertinence. The very notion of poetry involves a kind of permanence—"the everlasting omen of what is." On Jacob's ladder,

> The cut stone
> consoles his groping feet. Wings brush past him.
> The poem ascends.

And behind these images of permanence, of course, weighty domes of many-colored glass, rimes which out live monuments, the timeless images of the Latin and Greek poets, conferring immortality on their subjects.

We grew up with the hideous policies of John Foster Dulles. The official posture of American foreign policy during our childhood and adolescence was described as "brinkmanship." The term brings back almost the taste and smell of the Hoot Owl Cafe where I hung out, hoping, when someone put a quarter in the juke box they would play Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and the Coasters instead of Frankie Avalon and Pat Boone. One might long for the everlasting but to make a career of revealing that longing was a possibility which did not, and still does not, seem available. If one spoke in public, it was best to say "awopbopaloobopawopbamboom." If there was to be a poetry, it would be occult. The first years of Richard Grossinger's and Lindy Hough's *Io* provide the clearest public traces of the possibility. The very design of the magazine, which often made the poets a generation older than us nervous, emphasized a kind of secretiveness and anonymity.

As a European, Pierre Joris chose this context for his work. Although two of three sections of *Turbulence* were written in London and Paris (the third in San Diego), and despite Joris' persistent reference to the writers of the high European intellectual tradition—Michel Serres, Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, and others—the poetic from which the poems grow is thoroughly American. The intellectual context is weather—there to be dealt with, of necessity, but also inevitably to change radically. The moment to moment registration of attention in these poems makes no promises:

> NO, THIS IS NOT IMPRESSIONISM, THIS IS RANDOMNESS,
> AND THAT IS ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT.

We are now nomads. Joris' Luxembourg and my Missouri Ozarks are still there as possible conditions of attention, but they do not significantly name places. Neither Olson's Gloucester nor Duncan's hearth nor Levertov's bear perpetually in the wilderness yellowing the snow are available as anchors of permanence.

The generation of the A Bomb is now middle-aged; it has lived through the transition. The secretiveness of the late '60s and '70s has now given way to a stance which might be public. *Turbulence* is a testing of this possibility:

> the world as cloud not chambered depression
> & anticyclone
> from West to East is movement
> a shift northward ruffles our well-combed hair
> air pressure relative humidity
> absolute rigidity the sun only rises and sets
> rises and sets
> rises and sets
> father father yes
> I will marry
> your daughter turbulence

* * *

To say this quickly: the Modern—the seventeen-century modern—made available three grammars: the closed comparison or metaphor; the open comparison or collage; and the continuous field. Although metaphorical technique dominated poetry and philosophy for three centuries, all three grammars were available in the Seventeen Century: for example, in Descartes and Donne, in the anatomists (Burton and Rabelais), and in Paracelsus and Shakespeare's late plays as Olson shows. It is not surprising these grammars correspond to three aspects of the physical world: the mechanical, the organic, and the electromagnetic. And these differences continue to cause problems in the sciences as they do in the arts. Amongst the Modernists of the early Twentieth Century, the division shows up as a favoring of certain kinds of phenomena: thus, Eliot and Stevens favor the metaphoric; Pound and Williams the collage; Stein and Olson the continuous. The Postmodernists have found these grammars available as styles to be skillfully and apparently futilely recycled. The only additions are glitz and marketing.

For the Modernists and the Postmodernists, grammars were foundational; the one took up a grammar and formed the world to it, the other emptied it of all content, hoping thereby to perform an act of social clarification. For the Modernist, the limit was fascism; for the Postmodernist,

the limit is nihilism (which can only be reabsorbed into the conventionality which it rejects).

The other possibility, the one which we must now initiate, understands grammars as *products* of local consciousness. Grammars are *after* the fact—made-up, contingent, temporary. Language is, to be sure, a crucial content of consciousness, but it is the second thing, not the first (and its absence is also not the first thing.) Language makes available ways for us to show others what we see:

at the beginning all directions are equivalent.

All that is interesting and important happens in the first microseconds when we position ourselves at that point of omni-directional equivalence again and again. The rest is the weather, the only interesting part of the news—prophecy, not dull reportage.

—Don Byrd

Time and Eternity in Frank Samperi's Letters

Frank Samperi's letters and his writing were of one piece, and the principles that radiated from the letters identical to those in the prose and verse. In fact he often quoted his own publications, in the letters—if excusing himself for doing so; but usually it made no difference whether he added quotation marks or not.

The agenda for the discussions was habitually set by me. Frank had *had* the sort of quandaries I still have—a record of some of which is in The Prefiguration—though they were never quandaries in the centre of his thought even back then. He was an intuitive thinker—Platonic sense—intuitive of Divine Forms as the only reality. The problems I kept re-coiling around him about Time and Eternity were not really his own problems, at least regarding eternity, and he had many subtle arguments—not too far from the Doctor Subtilis either, whom he admired—to block off not only my Proustian moves to undermine comprehension of what's in time, but strategies I kept employing—at subsistence rates—to identify time and eternity from the standpoint of time, rather than that of eternity. Something like the reverse, a sense *only* of Eternity—in time—seems typical of the clear power of his own work. So I think the polarity can e-lucidate that, even though most of the discussion I quote was provoked by me.

Our quodlibets might seem neo-scholastic trivia (the precise word, actually) to those who see the terms of the "social sciences," and the rest, that we happened to have now, as the crystallization of truth in time, yet somehow perdurable in the transience. Like eternal verities, in fact, that have come clear only to us, smart fellars that we are—"fart smellers," as my National Service fellow-draftees used to say. And it is true equity to see them enbrochetted on the horns of longevitous dilemmas with new leases of life that they lack the muleta to dodge behind, let alone the milking pails to milk—when the equipage has been lying around for hundreds of years in the junkyard babyhood of our past.

Anyway, in case anyone thinks of this merely as historical casuistry, the specific problem of the relationship of Time and Eternity has as its corollaries and successors the problems of denotation and connotation, of haecceity and quiddity, of meaning and reference, of—to use the inept contemporary jargon—signifier and signified—though philosophical illiterates don't seem to see that as a problem, just keep bumping into it all the time and blaming the "metaphoric" solidity of the obstacle. In the light of Frank's orientation, essentially we presumed this to be the relationship between *nama* and *rupa*—or essence and substance-in-its-old-sense—or sometimes haecceity or quiddity. For him, though not for me, the only true realities *were nama* and Eternity. Substance and *rupa*, as he saw them, were only in-formed and lit by them, but were merely shadow, essentially, *needing* to be lit to have any reality of their own.

Here he is, responding to my theory that the Four Ages—Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron (or their Hindu *yuga* counterparts)—each entails a different centre, caste, orientation and morality for its era. The "intercalary period" of the Four Ages, the Great Year, is equivalent to the Twelve Days of Christmas at the solstice in the normal year—in some ways outside of quadripartite and seasonal time altogether. (And I equate *that* period with the hegemony of the *chandala*, the outcastes, and *their* particular orientation.)

> "Your 'intercalary period' with arc recalls I think four ages quattro etadi—and the fixed stars lo cielo stellato of the twelve parts one of a degree de la dodici parti l'una d'un grado for precocity the whole length to the end in age. With respect to the Godhead (Gottheit? numen?) *itself*, then's sinks himself most in Godhead the Dantesque s'india—but his point is paradisiacal—still: *timor Dei* removes even one so in—mercifully—to mercy—to intuit goodness and justice from shade and darkness—sapientially and intelligentially."
>
> (6/1/90)

All understanding for him, is situated in the Golden Age—and the understandings of Winter Autumn and Summer, grading into multiplicity from that unity, are relative to that. ". . .to intuit goodness and justice from shade and darkness," to see the Golden Age when it is most "obscured," is the strange gift that Samperi's poetry has. Notice that the time/times are *fixed* for him, as well.

The *claritas* of the Golden Age, of *nama*, of Eternity, gives him not only the matter of the work but its mode. So that the effect is as with a poem he found "very moving"—"every word appearing to every word" out of clarity and distinctness in light. (6/9/90) But at the heart of it, dissolving the adventitious combinations of the forms in time is "sacred number": "sacred number for me is: Only a divine spiritual mathematics can dissolve ars combinatoria ars characteristica." (31/3/89) "No substance or difference is present in a subject, or for that matter, given the overshadowing, present in an object. I entered, I wandered—I knew ratio the true relatio." (10/9/90) A "relatio" only to the centre and not between points on one or another periphery; and the "ratio" showing that it is proportion rather than the units of arithmetic that is meant by "number."

And the clarity of the expression is the same as the clarity of the vision, both informed by light and sacred proportion—not as two things but one. ". . .And use goes out and *recognizes* the one who uses *the spoken word* properly and spiritually, with beauty, because in *Art*, wherein and then when you're passed over no longer need because no longer there, inspiration revelation the whole art." (19/9/89)

So Samperi did not struggle to *express* the vision: ". . .the word follows upon the seeing—[. . .]—then from in mind I simply put to paper. . .years ago they told me that they couldn't accept my *work sheets* because they didn't look *worked*—page upon page without correction: His angel was with me from the beginning: as I went from in vision to in forth. . .and remain in foot in number." (17/10/90)

What is contrary to the seeing is just not-the-vision nor is it the ratio. "My sense is syllogistic, deductive—from Principle—not dynamical dialectical. As for expression, speech—I'm nowhere there—. . .*ingegno amzio*—. So, given such paucity, beyond Good and Evil falls short of me—for me. The solution to the *terms* you refer to is *negatio* divisionem (in the descent the return): in other words, one might say (poetically philosophically): "if the angel knows you, // then the antipathetic is the additive // never before you // before or after." (29/6/89) This is not an art of weighing-the-probabilities and reckoning which the most likely; but of focusing on the vision, in place, in time. The way of understanding is, in this Platonic sense, intuitive—"So you see I know not the sequence, the sequential." (31/3/89) And this is true not merely of dialectical reasoning, but of the abridgments in it that back most common opinions and understanding.

I will hesitate at exposition of the heart of the vision, staying on its fringes—but will just remark two further features, without elaboration. The basis of the "divine spiritual mathematics" of the "ratio" at the heart of the vision, is what Samperi calls "triadic root." It is not unitary in the way that profane mathematics is, "because triadic root is not triadic point." (31/3/89) I am not sure, fully, what this means; but it certainly does mean that the One of the Unity is not the one-that-is-not-the-second, as in facts or a debate, but the One without other (the same difference, logically, as between one-of-two-things-that-can-be-distinguished and the-one-that-is-the-whole). And the Gnostic (not Samperi's word) as-it-were levitates to it in the flight of the Alone to the Alone "the abomination of desolation // standing in the holy place." (8/8/89)

The second feature: Samperi distinguishes, in the approach, the "fedeli d'amore" from the "filii Heber." I have some idea what he means by this distinction, but not so thorough as to begin to gloss it.

Two dilemmas he had about the position of the eternal in time—both germane to our own problems, I hope. The first, the logical ("conceptual," or depth grammatical) one was forced upon him by my nagging persistence, no doubt:

> "Your mention of Hopkins brings home fully and forcefully my failure in the face of haecceitas. I don't think much of fame, or of faith in poetry—if poetry takes its stand in time, then it's as perishable as any other item in time—it fundamentalizes itself, reflecting a poetic stance: obvious and accessible. . .
> [Margin Note:] I sense you walking the upper plain looking toward in time—but not committed to it: in fact I read in you a desire to separate the one not of time off from the one of time: /// therefore, ***restitution*** // under the wing // God be praised!" (17/10/90)

This constitutes a very powerful point against the modernist attempt to seek to recover (A la Recherche) lost times, lost objects in time—in the specificity of their relationship to events. The sort of objectivity I personally believe to be at the heart of the Objectivist's endeavors (an endeavor I myself share): the consciousness of objects ***in*** time, but removed from their dependence upon time. "Louis' 'objectification'—tho he denied it—related back to Kant: the consciousness ***as act*** of objectification" (presumably meaning the Judgment not the Transcendental Aesthetic) (Oppen's Notebooks: Ironwood 26). For the specific object, to be recaptured, must have a similar description to some other objects—real or potential—else it is not describable nor specifiable. But in so far as it has, of course, it is not ***distinct***

from those objects—except numerically. There is quite a problem in capturing our "haecceity." And who would doubt that it is a practical problem, not merely a "conceptual" one.

And, following on, the captured object won't be distinct and original, but "obvious and accessible," following the template print of the master concept. "We appear to have lost the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies." (Pound: The Poetics of the New American Poetry: Allen & Tallman) If this vision is linked to: "No ideas but in things" and ". . .men were driven back upon the particulars of their own experience, the literal *things* of an immediate environment" (Creeley), then there is the quandary that this would seem to be the humdrum and the already-understood. Seeing it as haecceity, not as the repeatable, seems to require a peculiar vision outside-of-time, in time.

The same problem sits in waiting, with bull terrier's grip, for the notion of the "individual" that we have boiled down for ourselves using this logic. Any aspect of us that we have in common with others, any set of attributes, will not distinguish us from these others. The only thing that will distinguish us—but in exactly the same way—is a partite enumeration—like the drop of our ballot paper. We want it, though, to be more then that—individuality. We want it to be like possessing an individual soul, distinctly different in its attributes. It's a problem not all modern poets have been unaware of. So, Baudelaire:

> "Multitude, solitude: terms equal and interchangeable for the active and fertile poet." (Crowds, in Prose Poems)

Or Bronk:

> ". . .: we are human. Human is not to be something we know, but to be as the Jews say God must be, without an image. . ." (Life Supports, p. 119)

This is not the quandary as I myself see it, but as it is. Frank's solution to it is easily ignored. I will add: it is not my *own* solution. What's yours?

The second of his two problems in time—that of the poet, dying in it—is almost too painful to contemplate—particularly now, after I know that it has happened. He faced it bravely—with the consolation of natural beauty around him. Whether this is rightly part of the text I should be explicating, I don't properly know.

> ". . .for calling me to life. Some days I have to be wakened for being in death. I know I got thru *the expected time*: so I look

to God, but not even the why—of now is only living out my death. There's at least the inchoate argumentum non apparentum." (19/9/89)

". . .but my strength to learn—and effort—is gone—so I sit and listen to God's angel—like holding the rosary and not saying it." (6/1/90)

"I think the angel has entered my night [?]—may *restitution under the wing* be a fact truly sensed. So God has claimed me in illness, multiple illnesses, making a claim for me—" (16/8/90)

The following letters, quoted in full, were two of the last three I received from him. The one in between—which I've sub-intentionally mislaid—broke the friendship—as did other letters he wrote during this period to other friends. I believe, but I'm not sure, that it was partly to spare us the end, and partly to jettison excess weight so he could get on with the pretty solitary business of dying. The last letter, in hindsight, was written after the effort and contest were complete; and there is a tranquillity in it that should have indicated to me how close the end was. In fact, by the time I received the letter he would have been dead.

Incidentally, the quotes he refers to at the beginnings of the letters are: "Eternity is in love with the productions of time" (Blake), and "Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale" (Catullus) beginning, respectively, the first and the second—both quoted from memory now, as they were then.

And finally, as a valedictory note: "Your words ousia, hypostasis, substantia, persona stir the mind in the direction of Aquinas, Boethius—Damascene Chrysostom. . ." For me—whether or not I "first" used them then—these words stir the mind only in the direction of Frank Samperi.

January 4, 1991

Dear Clive,

Your quote from Blake can be linked in my mind with Blake's *The infinite alone resides in definite and determinate reality*. . ., which stirs in my mind to Bruno's *E' dunque l'universo uno, infinito, immobile* (The universe is consequently one, infinite, immobile. . .). . ., the profounder thinking, because *Questo non si muove localmente* (This is not moved—or does not move itself—locally) as claritas shines and clarifies properly. I would never think of mocking Blake.

So, altho my work may be as you say (not) *in the changing that occurs in time*, it still follows: So the local movement that pertains to the body of my work (that is, book canzone song) is virtual and illumination al. I.e., singularity is within ken—particularity not required as knowledge: so the fall remains *quia illi carmen expedibus: nos vero ex carminibus pedem constare dicimus. . . .*—Interesting for you to mention quiddity (quod quid est)—it brings to mind Dante's:

> Fai come quei che la cosa per nome
> apprende ben, ma la sua quiditate
> veder non puo, se altri non la prome.
>
> You do as he who apprehends well
> the thing by name, but its quiddity
> he can't see, if someone doesn't bring it out.

With reference to your ". . .you've never blotted a line?," there's this:

Poetry holds many: but does it hold friendship? the modern prosody seems to say no—so the soul goes toward something more of the nature of *subject*
in
objective—retaining unto reward
nominative
in
object
[Marginal Note: lines 6 to 14]—Cid's *Of* is marvelous: his *immensita* has fallen away: but to the credit and benefit of his greatness—as a poet

[lines 16 to 25]—I enjoy your intelligence—and the person you are

[lines 2 to end—P2]—so you see I made poetry spiritually unto reward even from the very beginning

Love from us,
Frank

June 20, 1991

Dear Clive,

Thank you for the quote from *Inferiae ad Fraters Tumulum*—my favorite reading of Catullus has always been Walter Savage Landor's (which has Boccaccio and Petrarca behind it)—rather than this century's recent vaudevillian impositionalist approach. . .My health hasn't been good—I've been in the hospital for *a month and a half over the last two months*—my heart in need of help! but what they did wasn't altogether successful in opening up, they decided against another by-pass, because, as they said, the risk of losing me was very great, *in the light* of my blood disease *as well* (before they let me go, they *transfused* me). . .: so where do I go from here? my mind my heart my bone marrow—in God, from day to day, His angel beside me—inside or out. —I'm glad you didn't close the door on our correspondence—and thanks for noting that my work doesn't need *adding to*—and for wishing me *a long time yet.* —Sangha is good—I would imagine no need to explain oneself—the *sight* in the light of the Order would be enough—maybe even faith and ambulating would be held in *dispensation*—for those solely and wholly given over fourfold.

It's true I still write poetry—but my illness(es) has taken *greatly* from me—my slowness is of a pathetic nature—sometimes I stay at a page, and wonder why I can't go forward—so I remember days of years ago, but even there in the remembrance nothing holds: still: the profusion of color of the garden takes me up. . .

Love from us, Frank

—Clive Faust

Speaking of the stars at night we were.
Federico Garcia Lorca. *Four Lorca Suites.* trans. Jerome Rothenberg. 20 pages, Sun & Moon Press, 1989. $5.
Jerome Rothenberg. *The Lorca Variations I-VIII.* Zasterle Press. 36 pp. $8.

Federico Garcia Lorca was the first non-American, non-English, poet I really read. There was a girl. There were hot muggy nights. There was love. She read Lorca's poems to me in Spanish on these nights. Such were the times of youth. My Spanish is no better now, but then a new translation comes forth.

These two books, *Four Lorca Suites* and *The Lorca Variations I-VIII,* are the beginnings of much larger books, a complete Lorca (now released) and more variations. These small books act as an invitation, small crystals complete in themselves. Or perhaps prisms refracting the language light of nature, the stars, the moon, the mind. These books break the light of Lorca into the phrases of the stars. Because these books are lyric delicacies I will choose one poem from each work to speak of and leave the rest to you.

Jerome Rothenberg gives the reader a clue as to the nature of the "suites," as a "type of 'serial poetry' (Blaser's and Spicer's term).'" For after Lorca who can forget Spicer? The *Four Lorca Suites* are "Three Prints of the Sky," "Caracols/Snails," "A Newton Suite," and "Seaside Prints" which opens with a poem "The Sea":

> The Sea
> wants to blow
> its lid.

The colloquial language builds the pressure cooker that is the non-ending tide. The green expanse rumbles and moves as "Coral giants / heave with / their shoulders." Oncoming waves peak and break the whitened tip of a shoulder's heave. With a color coral and a place coral, the poem moves into the lunar of cause and effect. That coral goddess shifting her skirts of green. Within the continual metamorphosis of sea to wave to breaker sings the next voice:

> And in their gold caverns
> the sirens
> try out a song
> that the water can sleep to.

The crest and trough of wave, from the every-day yawn to the seaweed sirens that lured Prufrock to his doom, beckon. A horizontal distance made into the blowing roar of a dragon. "Do you see its gullet / of scales?" (Not to mention its big coral teeth.) This crashing apparition fights toward "you" on the beach, making you a hero struggling with the Titans of nature. Hold firm. Stand "In front of the sea / raise your lances."

In San Francisco at a reading on September, 19, 1992, Jerome Rothenberg spoke about his writing *The Lorca Variations*. He wanted to publish his Lorca translations, but was unable to do so under contractual obligations. So he started writing poems caused by Lorca's work and his work with Lorca. Rothenberg said the variations are "not versions of Lorca," meaning a kind of free translation of the suites. Instead, the variations grapple with the language of Lorca, the nouns, the colors, the light of Lorca. As a homage, they were "written for beauty" he said. I agree.

Part [3] of Variation VII is subtitled "water," and dedicated to Charles Bernstein. (I vaguely remember an essay about water by Bernstein, but no matter.) Part [3]:

> Glass beehive.
>
> Other moon cells,
> this gateway
> for my kiss.
>
> O crystal prison,
> o beehive
> made of air!

In one sense, the water of the subtitle is the movement of suggestion, the flow between the nouns—beehive, cells, gateway, prison, beehive. This liquidity is the moving metaphor, a process engaging the language not ossifying, not freezing it. There is another metaphor here, but let it go. That's also part of the beauty of these poems.

These two books, *Four Lorca Suites* and *The Lorca Variations I-VIII*, are slight, granted, but they ring clearly, small bells resounding into that dark night of air. Like a lover lost but sweetly remembered.

—Avery E.D. Burns

Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book Machine, The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group 1973–1982, by Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, ed. with an Introduction by Steve McCaffery, Talonbooks, Vancouver, 1992

title: Steve McCaffery & bpNichol

Rash, shun algae!
O, man—
See?

Thick, it's often bookman's sheen.
Thack, O lechery,
search, reap,
or something tore on toe—

Erase her shug, rube,
nigh on to his heaven.
Tea, tree, thorough
nightie 'n ate—
He, too.

translation: C. Alexander

(a geomantic homolinguistic translation of the title, practicing one of the methods elucidated in Rational Geomancy.)

"There is no there there"—In the preceding sentence, for "no" substitute "only a" (there is only a there there). Durational centers, revisable frames, unacknowledged presents. . .There is no argument here, for anything final would be concerned with the past, leading to itself, finished and thereby discardable. Here (please take this reference to be not only this book, but anything imaginable in your own or anyone else's context as possibly indicatable by the word "here") everything is present, dependent, a research, an action. This is perhaps why so much depends on defining: narrative, translation, book, verse, prose,. . .But even definition, which begins and is practiced extensively in the early part of Toronto Research Group (TRG) "Report 2: Narrative," is later in that report questioned—"i think there's one thing there i'd like to retract in retrospect. what's that? well, it's the whole use of the term 'definition' which i don't think we really mean do we? it seems a better tack would be to choose a term like 'full description of the process.' yeah, i think that's really true, steve, because in fact, what we've tried to do is make the report itself true to the flow of the process at that moment. . .the moment of sitting down, like this, and typing as one of us raps." (137)

In a house to which I moved only a week ago I write this at a table looking out to a parochial school playground—upon the window through which I look I swatted two flies not five minutes ago. Because of the recent move my books are not yet unpacked, thus this essay will contain a minimum of reference and allusion outside the texts at hand (to the extent

that we see them as texts at all, but perhaps more on this later, not in this aside within an aside, creating at least a part of a context, context being all-important, again as we shall see later, postponement also being a major factor in the mathematical vector of the kids of the book-machine), an observation granted not as excuse but *as* context and as a hope of breaking some part of the barrier between you and me, reader.

The process of *Rational Geomancy* is dialogic (this before, as McCaffery states in the introduction, the dynamic duo had read Bakhtin) and brings into its pages/frames as wide a context as one might imagine. Nothing exists in isolation, and the illusion that it does is but one of the lies of the book as currently experienced. In most books (now as it was in the mid-1970s when this report was written) we gather context into delayed and nearly invisible frames we make subordinate to a dominant text and even call "footnotes" and "index." We thus bury the past and fabricate a (when analyzed) none too sturdy "new." TRG contrasts the current method with medieval texts which gather, in a visual typographic page with an outer text framing an inner text,

> external knowledge as the boundary of the present internal reading. What is now footnote was then the equivalent of the comic-strip frame, a significant syntactical unit in a much larger macrosyntactic structure that was all literature and the *summa* of knowledge. Indexing 'points' to the distant term in a cognitive duality. Arranging knowledge as context destroys the past/present duality. The reassertion of context, however, brings with it the dismissal, through pointing out the sheer absurdity, of the writer's omniscient role. When both process and context are revealed, we are forced to recognize that the single, isolated person/text is *always* lacunaire. (132)

Or, is part of a fabric, a weave.

Leafing through *Rational Geomancy,* one sees that it too is a weave. Although paginated and laid out consecutively, even for the most part chronologically, it is not necessary (Is it desirable? I have not answered that question, perhaps each reader will, for herself) to read it (or this review) in such a beginning-to-end manner. Probably the visual pages (approximately 65 of the 320 pages are entirely or predominantly visual, although my count includes comic-strip images, the amount and weight of whose textual elements vary considerably; quite a few more pages have visual elements embedded within or imposed upon them) will first entice the eye, leader of the reading experience, and likely, the first subsection to be read in its entirety (BUT DON'T TAKE THIS AS ADVICE, RATHER MERELY

SPECULATIVE DESCRIPTION) is TRG Report 2, Part 6, "NARY-A-TIFF: Written & Starring the Toronto Research Group, Directed & Photographed by Marilyn Westlake," in which photographs are laid out and dialogue is handwritten in balloons to form a comic strip. Therein, a highly energetic and richly allusive argument comes to a climax when one member of TRG supposedly slays the other, thereby killing communion and celebrating the triumph of authoritarianism. But in the last panel we see a resurrection. One can not simply end the presence of context, the experience that this is, after all, a shared earth. (And bpNichol remains a lively presence for many of us still, nearly four years after his passing—the euphemism for death seems appropriate here: passing on, passing through, passing a baton, the passing lane. . .

TRG calls its work "research" as opposed to theory, which is, according to the manifesto which opens the book (and which opened the particular Nichol/McCaffery collaboration which *is* TRG), "transient & after the fact of writing." (23) The reports literally re-search, see again, and gather a ground of writing, illuminating a context which includes translation, comic strip, medieval books, children's books, Native American story, board games (the book's dust jacket's interior is the game board for "Reading and Writing: The Toronto Research Game"), and experimental novels (although we must heed the advice quoted from Stanley Berne: ". . .I hate the word 'experimentation.' I think it is a very bad word. These are not experiments. These are finished products. They are actual accomplishments. They will serve as accomplished research, having investigated areas that were never investigated before."). (97) Perhaps the greatest partial omission in a book subtitled "The Kids of the Book-Machine" is the authors' lack of familiarity with the burgeoning artists' book movement, a field still expanding but which was already richly present at the time the TRG reports were begun. Nichol and McCaffery seem familiar with the work of a few conceptual artists and writers who have explored the form of the book, such as Diether Roth and John Furnival. They are not well informed about a much wider influx of printers, visual artists, and others who have made the book one of the liveliest art forms of our time. A consideration of such artists as Alison Knowles, Phil Sultz, Keith Smith, Walter Hamady, and Karl Young, all of whom had created major works by the mid-1970s, would have been very useful to TRG Report 2, Part 1: "The Book as Machine."

Research Report 1 concerns itself with geomantic, semiotic, and post-semiotic translation, as well as with a substitutive method of translation called "the developer." All of these processes emanate from a view of the translative act (attributed to Pound, Stein, & Valéry) as an "act by words upon words." (30) Words are translated into other words in the same language, sounds of one language are translated into sounds of another, words are translated into pictures, letters and words are translated *via* various methods of substitution, all with a hope that

> the centrality of translation takes on a new aspect of community in its multiple presentation of a sensory field. Total information is the translative process itself giving centrality to both translator and original text with the primary creative act of both original writer and translator asserted. (43)

Such creative acts engender further creative acts, a mission central to *Rational Geomancy,* in that it embraces the view that writing and reading are essentially the same. We must see each as part of an ever-generative fabric of creative, living context, one in which past inhabits a person, a text.

FICTIVE FUNNIES
FEATURING
SYNTAX DODGES
Today's episode illustrates one way out of the NARRATIVE CHAIN!! The other kids'll envy this Houdini style trick!
HEY!! What's this Pun doing here?
OH MY GOD!! I've fallen thru a hole in the narrative sequence into a different world!
1 2 3 ?...
meaningful sequence?

The brilliant "Research Report 2: Narrative" takes up 167 pages, well over half of the book, and researches the book as machine; the search for non-narrative prose (finally an impossible but driving "holy grail" sort of task); text as conversation; divided texts in which pages are sectioned off

to different purposes, not necessarily communicating with one another (but always cohabiting the page and communicating to the reader); rational geomancy: "the acceptance or a multiplicity of means and ways to reorganize those energy patterns we perceive in literature" (153); a possible manifesto of the book; the creation of a narrative board game; and the comic strip "NARRY-A-TIFF." *Now, reader, what do you think of this, I say, as I self-consciously step out of the objective reviewers robe I seem to have clothed myself in despite my desire, early on, to withstand such a dressing? Is this research as you conceive it? Is it not more a series of creative thrusts, not so much researching as boldly staking ground for research, perhaps attempting to answer a few questions (yet always questioning itself as well as anything else which enters the view), but, more than anything, opening the gate? Yes, go on in—or don't, if you don't want to—fly up & away instead.* As TRG tells us, what one does not read is as significant as what one reads. Together they form the "macrosyntactic context" of all of literature. "To choose to read is thus a decision to realign the macrosyntax; it is a geomantic act, a syntactic operation upon, and at the same time within, the macrosyntax which is literature." (156) The book, any book, is a syntactic unit within the whole, which is always being realigned in multiple ways by all readers and writers. The context informs and is informed by all writing and reading, and of this we should always be conscious (although TRG generally abjures "shoulds" or any other prescriptive strategies).

"The Language of Performance of Language," heretofore unpublished, is the third and last Research Report. Because of the uncontainable nature of the sixteen linked but separate performance instructions, descriptions, visual realizations, and scores which escape from the book to performance occasions outside its pages, this section is the least consumable and most exciting. It deftly suggests at once that any book is a performance and that nothing is ever complete or isolated. The "essays" clear away the never-really-present distinctions among writing, performance, art, research, and the body.

> These were sixteen essays then that included us as their inner terms. Essays *as a lived experience,* living out their fixity of form in the liquidity of transformation. As the eye emerged so the voice disappeared. We had been forced to reduce discourse and replace it by a hieroglyphical gesture in the belief that the performing being was a human hieroglyph, an instance of writing disintegrated into history. (272–3)

McCaffery & Nichol, as Toronto Research Group, as gesturing, breathing essay. The reader, too, is a performer.

It should be more widely acknowledged that one of the most important, and probably the most generative, North American literary conjunction of the century is the meeting of Steve McCaffery and bpNichol. The work in this book is only part of the evidence for such a claim. Not all brilliant (but much of it so), although practically all useful, the work is also primary in that it was among the first to bring into its field such problems as the shifting relations of signifier and signified, the un-naturalness of so-called realism, the visuality and sonority of language, and other contemporary issues of note; it did so before such discussions became part and parcel of the discourse of language poetry and the academy. Thus it helped lead us to the present while being ever-so-present itself. TRG adopts Gertrude Stein's injunction that "The business of Art. . .is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present." (100) This is a present book, and it points paths out from the present. Unlike much discussion of the issues raised here, TRG stresses the joy of creating, the play involved, the generative nature of mistakes, and a generosity of spirit *(Rational Geomancy* is a *gas)*. The book becomes an opportunity to play, and we are only fully human when we play.

—Charles Alexander

Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 1991).

Invariably, the need to redefine translation's proverbial "loss" figures among the first topics students want to discuss in a translation workshop. Not that "loss" is entirely inappropriate, they argue after only one or two exercises, but it pertains barely, if at all, to the impossibility of neatly transferring meaning from one language to another. Nor does "loss" refer to whatever illusions the students might have nurtured about accomplishing such a transferal, although this use of the word certainly touches closely on their work as novice translators. No, the loss they experience reaches much further than the relation between texts or even between languages, and it reaches with an unexpected intensity. At the first (mis)step, their bearings falter when a familiar, if never wholly adequate, language literally

gives way under the pressure to accommodate the unknown. As translators, however, they find this disorientation usually mitigated by a certain humor in the crack-up of language breaking down. Strangeness implies less a dearth of "equivalents" than a wealth of possibilities and a recognition that in the practice of translation one examines those possibilities from every conceivable perspective. Once that is done, choices must be made, of course, and they will entail the "loss" implicit in any reduction. What lingers for the translator, though, indeed what defines or is translation is not so much the choice as the plenitude and uncertainty, the "between" from which it arises. Since translations are seldom able to provoke translation (bilingual editions and annotated glossaries not withstanding), students soon recognize this experience of simultaneity as the absence worth mourning. And they begin to ask the question Suzanne Jill Levine addresses in *The Subversive Scribe:* how might a translator make available not only translations but also translation itself?

A highly accomplished translator who has worked extensively with some of Latin America's most innovative fiction, Levine has wrestled actively with that question since 1971, when she undertook her first translations. As she explains in her preface, no sooner had she begun to translate than she realized that her reader would lose both "the constant dilemmas and fugitive processes of the translation. . .[and] my ongoing dialogue with the authors." (xiii) This realization led to frequent essays about her practice as a translator and, ultimately, to *The Subversive Scribe*, which contains many of those essays in revised form as well as several new pieces. The result is an engaging, ambitious book based on the discussion of examples selected from Levine's translations of novels by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig, and Severo Sarduy—the three writers with whom she has worked most collaboratively. Read as the whole Levine intends, it operates restoratively, drawing the reader (back) into considerations of translation theory and practice that range from specific strategies to political implications. Or, to recall Don Quixote's comment that many translations are like tapestries viewed from the "wrong" side—an example dear to at least one of Levine's *authors*—*The Subversive Scribe* encourages the reader to slip between two appearances of a literary text and view words in transit, grounded absolutely on neither one "side" nor the other.

In keeping with her purpose of making practice accessible, Levine's prose is consistently straightforward and highly readable. If her continual puns at times seem excessive, they are also both clearly deliberate and appropriate to the work she discusses, occurring for the most part in chapters devoted to Cabrera Infante, punster *par excellence*. Even in the two most "theoretical" essays, Levine writes directly about a translator's necessarily indirect approach to demanding, oblique texts such as Sarduy's *De donde son los cantantes (From Cuba with a Song)* and *Cobra (Cobra)*.

In fact, her discussion of those novels offers a valuable introduction to a writer too little known to North American readers, despite the existence of several translations. The same could be said of Cabrera Infante and Puig, who, like Sarduy have not enjoyed the reception English-language readers have afforded other Latin American authors. A not unimportant aspect of Levine's book is the attention paid in it to these novelists "relatively marginalized" (182) for reasons textual, sexual, and/or political. She offers rich portraits of these men as writers, collaborators, and friends, and her strategies for translating their work can also serve as strategies for recognizing and reading in it a dissidence Levine finds "corrosive" and "radical" (182).

To describe those strategies briefly, perhaps the most useful words are *"bricoleur"* and "subversion." Levine's translator, as presented in the introductory comments and developed in subsequent chapters of *The Subversive Scribe,* closely resembles Claude Lévi-Strauss's "tinkerer." This clever, resourceful figure, adept at coming up with something from the bits and pieces of whatever is around, also appears in her descriptions of both Sarduy (39) and Puig (124). In the case of translation, that "something" refers not just to the translation, or product, achieved through a graceful assemblage of assorted skills and scraps of knowledge; it also includes the very person of the translator, a being "put together by a committee," as Margaret Sayers Peden once remarked.[1] To the *bricoleur* and Peden's composite, Levine adds the translator's sense of incompletion, an edge present only implicitly even in Peden's suggestion of masochism.[2] Drawn to displacement, to flip sides, to paradox, she writes that "We translate to be translated" (v), referring to her desire to speak a foreign language, to travel, to recapture a "dormant baroque in our pragmatic [English] language" (vii).

Although both the fiction Levine chooses to translate and her presentation of the translator suggest her understanding of "subversion," the discussion of her "poetics of translation" confirms that suggestion. A translator's subversion, she explains, teases out "underlying meanings" or "subtexts" (7). Rather than (futilely) attempt to provide a copy, it aims to prompt a continuation akin to Derrida's "living-on."[3] Subversive translation thus resembles the often extreme mutation (as in mutilation) required for successful grafting; at once "abusive and sustaining" (8), its transformation of work written is linked "symbiotically" or "parasitically" with the work of writing (7). To translate, then, is to transplant, adapting as necessary what are conventionally referred to as the source and the target languages.

In order to demonstrate her work as one of *bricolage* and subversion, Levine has chosen instances of language at its most "untranslatable." These include puns (Part I), written representations of highly playful colloquial speech (Part II), and sections of parody and rewriting in which fragments

of literature or popular music embedded in the "source" text provide the source of which that text is itself a translation (Part III). Levine makes it clear that she does not expect her examples to be representative of all translation practice, not even all literary translation practice (167). Her method is not metaphoric but metonymic; indeed her technique might well be termed "Caravaggesque," recalling Sarduy's "chiaroscuro" technique: "the 'brutal' projection of light serves as a condensing procedure to catch the eye, making it concentrate on one of the figures..." (155). That "figure," whether pun, snippet of verbal banter, or entire passage (at times even entire text) serves as her unit of translation and is examined closely; the Spanish context is presented, options for translation are explored, and Levine's choice is explained. In most cases it is a choice made either in collaboration with the author or after consultation with him. Although they are not equally fluent in English, in the translation projects Levine discusses each of the writers took an active interest, encouraging—and at times even prompting—her to find solutions that played with or against English in ways analogous to their own rewriting of Spanish.

Levine's examples are well chosen, and they make clear the less-than-clear distinction between writing and translation she stresses. Not only are some of the originals rewriting of English texts (such as Cabrera Infante's incorporation of Hemingway's *The Green Hills of Africa* in *Vista del amanecer en el trópico)*, the translation of those originals at times led to their rewriting in Spanish or they proved to have a direct influence on other writing by their authors—not to speak of the involvement of those authors-turned-translators in the English version. What is more, Levine's development as translator was also tantamount to her development as a writer. Since those texts with which she worked were bound so inextricably to popular culture, to history, and to experimentation with language, she often found herself moving further and further from the Spanish, making decisions far more "writerly" than "translatorly" in order to provide the English-language reader with a "foreign" experience in recognizable terms.

The difficulties inherent in that effort are enough to make any translator despair, as—one imagines—Levine must certainly have done, at least on occasion, when the turn of a phrase or the line of a song seemed too distant to give rise to any bridge between her two languages. In *The Subversive Scribe,* however, despair is present only by implication. Although she wonders how a reader confronting Sarduy's use of the *son* might be enabled "to sing along when the original music cannot be heard" (143), her attention is fixed on her response and the question itself does not give her pause. That she answers so fully, with such wit, proves, ironically, to be both strength and weakness, for it keeps the reader at a remove through the very mechanism meant to open her practice. Perhaps this is inevitable, since a practitioner's discussion of work completed occurs unavoidably in

a successful preterit. In this instance, however, some less preterit examples, or even some less successful ones, might have given rise to exercises that resembled more closely the practitioner's "inquisitions" Levine mentions in her preface (xii). The commentary on versions unused and her obvious willingness to learn from both past experiences and the writers with whom she worked indicate the sensitivity and humility necessary for such specialized work with language and keep *The Subversive Scribe* from being smug, but at the same time the presentation of one published solution after another ultimately tends to diminish rather than dramatize (167) a sense of ambivalence or risk.

"Memory and language are fellow traitors, translating what they cannot capture," Levine remarks in her chapter on Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers* (89), and as I read the final section of *The Subversive Scribe*, that sentence came to mind with respect to the "translation" of her own experiences. Especially in her epilogue, a memory less "traitorous" and more inquisitorial might have encouraged Levine to probe several issues that remain subtextual. One of those issues is her own role as a North American woman who translates the work of male writers "feminized" on the margins of mainstream Latin American literature but hardly "feminist" with respect to their creation of female characters. Levine calls attention to that contradiction in her own "story" (181–182) but does not develop it—or its implications—fully. The same could be said about the story of those Latin American texts published, packaged, and promoted by North American publishing houses or about such questions as the apparently arbitrary enthusiasms of North American English-language readers. The extent to which Levine's poetics of translation might be applicable to work by writers other than the ones she mentions also merits more consideration than an acknowledgment that "I can only speak for my own experience and hope that others find familiar repercussions. . ." (167)

Given the intentions expressed in her preface,[4] it would not have been inappropriate for Levine to speculate, for example, about the degree to which her subversive strategies would prove helpful when collaboration between translator and writer was impossible or when working with writers whose relation to their own language and culture was less cosmopolitan, whose politics were those of allegiance rather than abrasion or exile. Although Levine touches on each of these questions, she does not explore them, and I believe that by expanding the context of translation practice she might have both made it more accessible and enabled it to surpass her own experience. On the other hand, she has offered enough examples and offered them so gracefully that individual experience is pushed to limits reminiscent of Sarduy's "'hypertelic' extremes" (43). The reader formed by her book may well be enough of a *bricoleur*—or *bricoleuse*—to initiate their subversion.

NOTES

1 "A Conversation on Translation with Margaret Sayers Peden," *Translation Perspectives IV: Selected Papers, 1986–87,* ed. Marilyn Gaddis Rose (Binghamton, NY: National Resource Center for Translation and Interpretation, 1988), 143.

2 "To varying degrees a translator is composed of creative writer, scholar, archivist, innovator and, often a large portion of masochism" (Peden, 143).

3 Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida,* ed. by Christie V. MacDonald and trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 118. The discussion transcribed in the "Roundtable on Translation" (93-161) informs both Levine's poetics and her practice in *The Subversive Scribe.*

4 "But these [North American] readers also need to understand *how* Latin American writing is transmitted to them, and *how* differences and similarities between cultures and languages affect *what* is finally transmitted" (xiv-xv).

—Carol Maier

Harryette Mullen. *Trimmings*. (New York: Tender Buttons, 1991).

Trimmings exposes the way a woman's body is a moment in language, the way the parts of speech are the parts of a trousseau, the way women are caught in language as they are caught in stays, belts, wraps, garters, buckles: "a body wearing language as clothing or language a body of thought which is a soul or body the clothing of a soul" (66). She writes, "the veiled, unavailable body makes an available space" (66). *Trimmings* is written in this space.

Even the sprawled nude body of a woman cannot escape these constraints of gaze. Mullen looks on to see:

> A light white disgraceful sugar looks pink, wears an air pale compared to shadow standing by. To plumb recliner, naked truth lies. Behind her shadow wears her color, arms full of flowers. A rosy charm is pink. And she is ink. The mistress wears no petticoat or leaves. The other in shadow, a large, pink dress. (15)

Here is Manet's *Olympia:* the white woman's body a "plumb recliner," the

black woman's body a "shadow." And at the same time here is Stein's "A Petticoat" from *Tender Buttons* which is "a light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm." A comparison which was not clear before is suddenly made clear—this passage comments on Manet, on Manet as related to Stein, on Stein. When Stein writes "A Petticoat" she abstracts Manet—the women's bodies turn to color, to symbol. While Stein writes "an ink spot," Mullen instead writes "and she is ink." Mullen thus rewrites to bring the woman's body back, to comment on racial bias. The reader is allowed to see the body as female, as black, but not as object. She exposes the way the "naked truth lies" across the bed and the way it lies about presenting a truth, an exposure, of a woman's body. For the body of *Olympia* is a "light white" that relegates the black body to shadow.

While Mullen rewrites Stein to present varieties of women's bodies, her prose poems draw heavily from Stein's tradition. She uses for example Stein's project in *Tender Buttons* to free the word (the noun), "to refuse them by using them." This work is full of the pun, the slip, which has "loose lips, a telltale spot, where she was kissed and told" (22).

This project to free the word is not unique to Stein or avant-garde writing—for the word in standardized English is also freed in dialectal language. Double meanings in children's rhymes are suddenly clear through Mullen's reciting: "quick snatch, in a clutch, chased the lady with the alligator purse" (8). *Trimmings* turns often to Black English, reminds that there is "someone in the kitchen I know" (11). Thus Josephine Baker appears, "in feathers, in bananas, in her own skin, intelligent body attached to a gaze. Stripped down model, posing for a savage art, brought color to a primitive stage" (47).

—Juliana Spahr

Noticings

In a year in which Amy Clampitt and Irving Feldman have won MacArthur Awards for poetry (Robert Creeley was evidently in the running since I was asked to write a letter on his behalf but he didn't make it!), and in which Mona Van Duyn has been named Poet Laureate, it is doubly comforting to receive in the mail Emmanuel Hocquard and Claude Royet-Journoud's elegant new anthology, *49 + 1: Nouveaux poets américains*, published at Royaumont in 1991. This 341-page volume is a sequel to two

earlier anthologies: Michel Deguy and Jacques Roubaud's *Vingt poètes américains* (Gallimard 1980), which took Gertrude Stein as its precursor figure and presented the work of the major Black Mountain, New York School, Objectivist, and ethnopoetic poets of the late sixties and seventies; and Hocquard and Journoud's *21 + 1* (Delta, 1986, although the selection was made some five years earlier), an anthology featuring more recent "experimental" poetry (Language poetry and related movements), the "1" non-American being Tom Raworth. A ground rule of *21 + 1* was that no poet already published in *Vingt poètes américains* was included and the same ground rule applies to the new *49 + 1*.

In the Introduction to *49 +1,* Hocquard notes that *21 + 1* was not designed to privilege any particular tendency or school, the aim being merely to foreground certain characteristic traits found in the poetry that "interested us"; these traits include "priority given to language as the substance or subject of the poem and not just as simple instrument of expression or esthetic decor; richness and complexity of formal inventions . . .mobility, liberty and dynamism of a vigilant poetry that has broken away from the formally and ideologically academic and conservative models that exist in the U.S. as they do everywhere else" (pp. 12-13, my translation). They do indeed, as the award system (MacArthur, Guggenheim, NEA) and mainstream "little magazine" system *(Poetry, Kenyon Review, Georgia Review)* regularly reminds us. All the more remarkable then that it took a French poet to found a center *(Un bureau sur l'Atlantique at Royaumont)* hospitable to the "new new American poetry" and to publish such a rich anthology of this poetry, much of it still largely unknown in the U.S.

The new book *49 + 1* (this time the "1" is Asa Benveniste, born in the Bronx but living all his life in England), is billed as a gathering of writers "born in the forties, fifties, and sixties, who began to publish (with the exception of five among them) toward the end of the seventies, in the eighties, and even at the beginning of the nineties. Certain poems here translated were still unpublished in the U.S. at the time we made our selection" (p. 15). This characterization is not quite accurate, for most of the poets in *49 + 1* are of the same generation as the *21 + 1* group, and some, like Hannah Weiner and David Bromige, belong to the generations represented in Vingt poètes américains. Indeed, *49 + 1* is more accurately described as a valuable supplement to *21 + 1,* which unaccountably included Charles Bernstein but not Bruce Andrews, Rae Armantrout but not Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, but not Barrett Wattan, Robert Grenier but not Steve Benson, and so on. But there are also plenty of new names, including a poet I've never heard of named Robert Kocik, who lists under his credits, "Pas de livre. A peine un corps" ("No book. Barely a body"), but who is famously translated by Anne-Marie Albiach. And aside from such language poets as Tom Beckett, Alan Davies, Carla Harryman, Tom Mandel, and Kit

Robinson, there are experimental fiction writers like Lydia Davis, Barbara Einzig, and Fanny Howe, visual poets like Johanna Drucker, a sizable number of poets who belong to no particular school, like Norma Cole, Rachel Blau duPlessis, Benjamin Friedlander, Stephen Ratcliffe, Joseph Simas, and Marjorie Welish, and two poets born after 1960, Gale Nelson and Elizabeth Robinson.

As in any anthology of this kind, there are notable omissions. Partly, inclusion depends on the personal tastes of individual translators, many of whom are themselves poets like Dominique Fourcade, Joseph Guglielmi, and Jacques Roubaud. Partly, the Bay Area, where Hocquard and Royet-Journoud have spent time and been warmly welcomed, gets pride of place (although even then, Beverly Dahlen and Kathleen Fraser are oddly omitted). And partly, inclusion depends upon translatability: such prose texts as Fanny Howe's and Peter Seaton's read, in Pierre Alferi's translations, as if they were "always already" in French, as does Hocquard's own translation of Ray DiPalma's "January Zero," a sequence that begins by parodying elementary French readers like *Toto et Tristan* and hence seems perfectly "natural" in French. Here is the first section:

> Je prends un verre. Je remplie Ie verre. Je bois l'eau. Je lave le verre. J'essuie le verre. Je le donne le verre. Je prends une bouteille de lait. Je pose la bouteille sur la table. J'ouvre la bouteille de lait. Je prends un verre propre. Je remplie le verre propre de lait. Je te donne un verre de lait. Je bois un verre de lait.

* *

One of the serious omissions in *49 + 1*, an omission also made in Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree,* is Canadian poetry. One can understand the anthologists' desire to preserve national identity and it is true that we would not expect to find, say, an Australian poet like John Tranter or a New Zealand poet like Michelle Leggott in *49 + 1*. But the case of Canada strikes me as special because there is so much interchange between our adjoining countries. U.S. poets have regularly been featured at the Vancouver Poetry Festival and at the Kootenay School of Poetics; journals like *Raddle Moon* and *Writing* regularly publish U.S. work, American poetry critics like Jed Rasula teach at Canadian universities (in this case, Queens), even as Canadian academics like Linda Hutcheon and Peter Quartermain are central to an understanding of our own writing, and finally—emblem of emblems— even the 1993 MLA will be held in Toronto. One would think, then, that at a time when sensitivity to subcultures and marginalized groups is *de rigueur,* Canadian poetry—one of the liveliest anywhere today—

would be part of the American Poetry Picture. Indeed, *49 + 1* may be profitably read against a fascinating new book just published by Talon Books in Vancouver, *Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book Machine, The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group, 1973-1982,* by Steve McCaffery & bp Nichol, edited by McCaffery. For $18.95 plus $2.50 shipping (201-1019 East Cordova Street; Vancouver, B.C. V6A 1M8 Canada; U.S. distributor: Univ. of Toronto Press, 340 Nagel Drive, Buffalo, N.Y. 14225-4731), you get a startlingly vivid history of the decade when poetry and theory first started to be aware of one another and doing something about it. The book, beautifully produced and illustrated, is also McCaffery's homage to his close friend and collaborator, who died in 1988 at the age of 44.

So what was the Toronto Research Group all about? The notes reproduced here are based on "the short-circuiting of transmission along the lines of the following secretarial formula: "Steve is dictating his thinking, thinking Barrie is typing this dictation. However, Barrie is typing out his own thoughts on the matter and Steve doesn't know it." The result is a "present inability to decipher whose thinking was whose," a "seamlessness in cognition" that produces a "margin between oral energy and the preservational fixity of print" (p. 11). Provisionality is thus a watchword, beginning with the first principle of the opening Manifesto: "1) all theory is transient & after the fact of writing" (p. 23).

In practice, the individual "Research Reports" take up various seminal theories (like Jerome Rothenberg's early formulation of "Total Translation") and then interrogate them and test their limitations. Thus in the report on "Narrative," Nichol and McCaffery present important distinctions between lyric poetry and prose. The short poem, they argue, usually involves "a significant degree of iconicity: we see the poem as a visual whole before we read it. Perceived optically as a complete unit the page is qualified to such an extent that it ceases to function as an *arbitrary* receptacle, or surface, for the maximum number of words it can contain. . .becoming instead the frame, landscape, atmosphere within which the poem's own unity is enacted and reacted upon." By contrast, "in both prose and the visually continuous poem (Milton's *Paradise Lost,* for instance) the page has no optical significance. Being to a large extent a working out of information through duration, prose structures tend to be temporal rather than visual. . . .In extended prose or poetry the page becomes an obstacle to be overcome" (p. 61).

These fruitful distinctions lead to larger speculations on narrative form. In the case of the normal linear book, page is no more than a surface to be *"endured* as a means to the complete reception of the book's information." As a "machine of consumption," the linear book is thus naturally threatened by other media, especially television and film, which

"afford more rapid and totally sensorial means of satisfying [the] appetite for story" (pp. 62-63). It follows that if the page is to be retained, it had better do other work: the authors now supply us with intriguing examples of page reform, like Kitasano Katué's "self-portraits" made by crumpling his own pages and then photographing the results for purposes of "documentation" (p. 71).

But even as the examples of page design multiply, we come, in the appended notes titled "A Bibliography," to qualification. Note 1 reads: "This argument regarding the difference of poetry and prose is clearly faulty. Both of us came to realize that it permits no place for the prose poem: a historically verified genre." (p. 92). Another distinction is now proposed, having to do with the status of the word: "In prose the word is component of the minimal unit which is a breath paragraph. . . .This is not the case in poetry where the word is an absolute unit brought into the presence of similar absolutes. Or again, the distinction is judged to be grammatical: "Prose has to be destructive. In prose you create a context for verbal (phonic & semantic) collision. In poetry you create a territoriality by means of a spatial syntax" (92-93). These definitions don't so much correct the first one as supplement it, in Derrida's sense of supplementarity (both addition and substitution). Repetition and revision, Nichol and McCaffery imply, are always essential to the useful formulation of poetics. Put the other way round: no "normative difference" between poetry and prose can be definitively established, the interest being in the questions rather than the answers.

The title research report on "Rational Geomancy" is produced in two bands (upper band = Nichol; lower band = McCaffery) that engage in dialogue on a quasi-Bakhtinian (but also Derridean, as in *Glas)* model. "Rational Geomancy" is defined as "the acceptance of a multiplicity of means and ways to reorganize those energy patterns we perceive in literature" (p. 153), and throughout this section, comic strips, cartoons, word games, puns, anecdotes, and jokes collide with theoretical explication, scholarly excursus, and elaborate etymology to make up a wonderfully funny and engaging disquisition on the state of the art, circa 1981. In coming to terms with the "book-machine," Nichol and McCaffery move freely between poststructuralist theory (especially Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida) on the one hand and the poetics of such fellow-poets as Christopher Dewdney and Bill Bissett on the other.

Reading these "research reports" in the nineties, when "theory" has become, for the typical graduate student, an oppressive body of texts-to-be-mastered in preparation for the academic job market, it is surprising to see just how much fun the reception of French poststructuralist theory could be, before idolatry and ossification set in. In this sense, Rational Geomancy has a genuinely heuristic value. It provides a good antidote to

those ubiquitous and dreary theory textbooks, which endlessly reproduce the same essays (e.g., Stanley Fish, "Is There a Text in this Class?"; Paul de Man's "Rhetoric of Temporality," Foucault's "What is an Author?," Sandra Gilbert's "Literary Paternity"), and which treat literary works as so many convenient exempla used to illustrate this or that "theory-point." The TRG neatly reverses this order: theory, Nichol and McCaffery imply, is just fine as long as it doesn't violate the spirit of poetry.

In their speculations as to the role of computer technology in the transformations of the "book-machine," Nichol and McCaffery cannily anticipated the work now being done on the electronic page by such scholars as George P. Landow, whose *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Theory and Technology* (Johns Hopkins 1992) is an intriguing, if finally disappointing, foray into this new field. Landow begins by citing the authority of Derrida and Barthes, who, like the computer scientists Theodore H. Nelson and Andries van Dam, "argue that we must abandon conceptual systems founded upon ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them with ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks" (p. 2). *Hypertext,* a term first coined by Nelson in the sixties, "refers to a form of electronic text, a radically new information technology, and a mode of publication," specifically, "a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (p. 4). In this form of *nonsequential writing,* blocks of text, equivalent, says Landow, to what Barthes terms *lexia,* and the electronic links that join them, can be arranged in any number of ways, replacing the linearity of the conventional book with digital simultaneity.

Many computers, my own Macintosh LC included, now provide a program called HyperCard. To show what HyperCard can do, Landow gives the example of a software program that allows the student to interact with Tennyson's *In Memoriam.* Since this long poem rejects the linearity of "conventional elegy" in favor of the "brief lyrics" that "best embodied the transitory emotions that buffeted [the poet] after his loss" of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam, and since these lyrics are fragmentary, interlacing "dozens of images and motifs and informed by an equal number of minor and major resolutions" (p. 37), it lends itself perfectly to the *"In Memoriam* web" reproduced on p. 39 of *Hypertext,* which links up individual sections by imagery and leitmotifs. The user can move from "Dark house" (#7) to the "Doors" of that house (#119), from "waiting for a hand" in the former to "the pressure of thine hand" in the latter, and so on. Or again, the "reader" can move from a specific passage to commentary on that passage by the poem's critics, to "Religion and Philosophy" or "Science and Technology" or "Cultural Context: Victorianism"— all by the mere click of the desktop mouse. The **IN MEM OV** (*In Memoriam* Overview), appearing at the upper left of the screen, serves as directory organizing all these possibilities.

Landow makes large claims for this new *"docuverse."* The "reader," he argues, now becomes a producer, sharing the author's role in a new dialogic, polyphonic, multivocal system. The reader-producer decanters the text, reconfigures it, creates new multilinear reading paths. "Electronic linking shifts the boundaries between one text and another as well as between the author and the reader and between the teacher and the student. . . .Its effects are so basic, so radical, that it reveals that many of our most cherished, most commonplace ideas and attitudes toward literature and literary production turn out to be the result of that particular form of information technology and technology of cultural memory that has provided the setting for them" (p. 33).

Well. . . .yes and no. It's true, as many poets (Nichol and McCaffery among them) have noted in recent years, that hypertext forces us to rethink the whole question of poetic boundaries, that it opens up exciting new possibilities for writers and verbal-visual artists. But the examples Landow gives, like that of the **IN MEM OV** above, are just clever strategies for getting students to do what they always did: trace image patterns in *In Memoriam*, relate the poem to its period, to the "scientific background," and so on. What Landow and other hypertext enthusiasts ignore is that the role of the student-as-producer is severely limited by the nature of the input: someone, after all, has put all those links into the system, someone is telling the reader what the key images are, what "background" is relevant (and hence what background isn't); what biographical facts count, and so on. Most important, someone is telling the "reader-producer" that *In Memoriam* is an important poem, worth studying, worth taking apart so as to identify its thematic clusters and repeated sounds.

How much freedom, in this scheme of things, does the reader-producer have? He/she can move the counters around and produce quasi-parodies: "shipwreck" and "drowning" could be moved away from the themes of "time" and "death" and placed in the biographical column or related to Victorian science for the hell of it. Or another program could be called up and **IN MEM** could be collaged with, say, **THE WASTELAND.** But the more input the program gives us, the more limitations are placed on the reader. Thus, while I agree with Landow that at least *potentially,* in hypertext, "the functions of reader and writer become more deeply entwined with each other," (71) in practice, given the nature of software development, the prospects for "innovative" programming and "revolutionary" poetry criticism, much less poetry writing, are not encouraging. Who, after all, is going to create the **CANTO OV** for Pound scholarship or the **MAX OV** for Charles Olson's great poem? Will these **OVs** be part of the hypertext canon? And what does it take to qualify for the sort of "collaborative authorship" Landow describes? Given the recent choices made by Official Verse Culture with which I began this essay, one wonders

if hypertext is as "infinitely re-centerable" as Landow thinks. The new technology, in any case, bears watching.

—Marjorie Perloff

Marlene Nourbese Philip, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (The Mercury Press, 1991)

Looking for Livingstone joins the ranks of an increasing number of works that seek to confront legacies of colonial violence through the enactment of a kind of reversed Middle Passage. Its theoretical counterpart in this effort would be a work like J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, its poetic one Derek Walcott's epic, *Omeros*. Philip's text uses both prose and poetry to explore, to shape, the silences /spaces of the Livingstone "history," disclaiming his "discoveries" (she calls him "Livingstone-I-presume") and disrupting his silencing of the others of his narrative—the "untamable barbarians" and the women—by attributing to them a Silence which is not merely the absence of words, but a precious resource in its resistance to the colonization of *the* Word: Livingstone's tools, we discover, are ultimately impotent, his Conradian desire to "fill" the map of Africa an abortive attempt to confer his personal dissolution upon others for all eternity.

The prose pieces serve to document the narrator's education in Silence, describing her visits to a number of peoples whose tribal names form anagrams of that word. Each of these educates the narrator, known only as the Traveller, in the textures, the variables of Silence, rehearsing the liberation that is enacted when she finally confronts "Livingstone-I-presume," the culmination of the odyssey. The prose sometimes declares its allegiances and disaffections too neatly, and will no doubt have critics stumbling over each other to join in the academic game of naming allusions which so often obscures the materiality of poetic vision. Included, for example, are a kind of "postcard from the edge," a letter from Mary Livingstone to her husband, claiming that her (Freudian, white, female) silence cannot compete for his attention with the (Freudian, black, female) silence of the African continent, and a scene in which the narrator is to "stitch a quilt in all the colours of [her] silence"—a rather overwhelming evocation of Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens."

The narrative's location of itself through its reference to a communal cultural history is seldom irredeemably pedantic. The description of the

Museum of Silence as a measure of containment, a repetition of Livingstone's project in its transformation of indigenous silences into a cultural commodity, would appear to be Philip's retelling of the violence of "Into the Heart of Africa" exhibition, to which Canadians of African heritage responded with anger in 1989-90.[1] The prose piece makes its point succinctly and exemplifies the occasional humour of Philip's narrative:

> It was one of the world's wonders, they told me, this Museum of Silence—never had so much silence been gathered together under one roof, and they were proud of it. My silence—our silence—carefully guarded and cherished by them! My silence was now a structure, an edifice I could walk around, touch, feel, lick even—and I did—it was cold, cold to the tongue. I could, if I wanted, even pee on it, though that would be difficult, contained as it was behind plexiglass. (57-58)

Philip demonstrates a canny skepticism about the reception of her own text, supplying an "Author's Note" which suggests that the Traveller's diaries have already become a trophy in the library of another big white game hunter, the Chief Archivist and Librarian of the Bodleian.

If I have divided my discussion of Philip's poetry and prose in a way that the form of the text would attempt to reject, it is because Philip's poetry, the intuitive, material component of her exploration-without-colonization, constitutes the best of what *Looking for Livingstone* has to offer. The relationship between Word and Silence, a paradoxical one that moves according to necessity from rape (the narrator's space/womb; Livingstone's word/phallus) to violent creation ("In the beginning was the Word") and restorative re-vision ("in the beginning was / not / word / but Silence / and a future rampant / with possibility") is worked out immediately in the poetry, not simply as narrative theme, but as substance, in the shaping of space by text, silence by sound:

> In the beginning was
> the ravage
> in
> word inside time
> inside
> History
> Silence seeks the balance
> in revenge
> the cut in precise
> cleaves to the ever in Word

seeking to silence
Silence

The goal of *Looking for Livingstone*—the re-cognition of Silence through prophetic use of words—is felt here, rather than in the perambulations of the prose narrator, whose teachings at times overwrite the power of the poetic voice to exercise the resistance she seeks to confirm.

NOTE

1 In 1989 the Royal Ontario Museum decided to do an exhibition which they hoped would serve, or would be of some service to, the African community in Toronto. They discovered that the majority of African artifacts owned by the R.O.M. were those donated by Canadian missionaries, a community deeply implicated in the colonization process of which Livingstone, as Marlene Nourbese Philip puts it, was "the thin edge of the wedge." Despite the museum's attempts (variously regarded as honourable, a total failure, or something in between) to recognize the politics of cultural representation within the exhibition itself, the African community of Toronto rejected the display as immoral and racist, thus ensuring that those American museums scheduled to receive it as a travelling exhibition cancelled their bookings: it ran in Toronto from November 6, 1989 to August 6, 1990 but was not shown elsewhere.

—Rosemary J. Jolly

Noticings

Insel (Black Sparrow Press, 1991) is a novel/memoir by Mina Loy dating from (circa) 1936, edited with an afterward by Elizabeth Arnold, and with a lucid introduction by Loy's executor, Roger L. Conover. No man, in proverbial form, is an island, but Loy found the apparent exception to this rule, and the work is based on him (in "real life" Richard Oelze, an artist) and on the strange "island" their relationship made. The novel depicts Loy as if she were a castaway on this island, because she chooses not to treat with circumstantiality any of the details of her/her protagonist's life in Paris except her bond to Insel. So she will say, I came from the movies, or from dinner with others, leaving her social, her everyday, her commonsense self undiscussed, and then return obsessed and fascinated to the observation of this self-destructive hunger artist, Luftmensch, and forager. The work memorializes her complicit, needy gaze on "that enjailed jewel, his artist spirit" as contained in "this human wreck"—a type which does indeed seem to fascinate creative women. (The work does not explicitly analyze the

gender valences of this phenomenon, but it offers important data.) Her bond is an album of romantic thralldom (cf. the allusions to *Wuthering Heights),* one which, she thinks occurs because of Insel's incredible commanding negativity—a kind of radium run backwards into chaos. So questions of identity predominate. His "conjury," his "weird power," his "diaphanous stuff," his ability to disintegrate while one is watching, like an endless replay of the portrait of Dorian Gray evoke her charmed, but dangerous, "dislocation of identity" as she lets him use her studio, as she feeds him, watches him sleep, cleans his rotten suit with gasoline, and basks in his magical rays. But she realizes that, just as he seems to support himself by some general sexual pimping, he is also supporting himself through a kind of aesthetic-emotional pimping or predation—living off her admiration. And with that realization, she does break away. (The bits about the "two negresses" around the question of who is prostituting whom are a real grim addition to the tracking of modernist gazes of whites on blacks.)

* * *

Beverly Dahlen's *A Reading 8-10* is beautifully presented by Chax Press (Tucson, 1992) and joins the other parts of this book, *A Reading (1-7)* from Momo's Press in 1985, and *A Reading (11-17)* from Potes & Poets Press in 1989. The Chax cover by Cynthia Miller—a red folkloric child's chair by a lush foliated background—does indeed evoke some of Dahlen's themes of the homey (heimlich) and the uncanny (unheimlich), of memory, absence, and dailiness. Before systematization, says A. N. Whitehead, in *Modes of Thought,* there must be "assemblage." This is a poetics for Dahlen (and for Ron Silliman, whose work is discussed in this book several times). Dahlen produces these works (which look like prose paragraphs of phrases, joined in long cantos) in a liminal space of free association, seriously influenced by Freud, and by a poetics of meditation and myth from H.D. In such a work everything is intertwined: a list of topics would be a net of a collective feeling—war, romance, memories of childhood, the visceral pain of USA politics and economics, one's parents, the genres fiction and biography, Christianity, changes of the seasons and one's moods. It is one of the astonishing, masterful aspects of her work that reading it makes you think of other things. A good deal of *Reading 8-10* is a meditation on the place of the female figure, the beautiful woman in culture (in lyric like Creeley's and Marvell's, plays like *Lear* and *Oedipus,* novels like *Emma,* films), and more particularly the place of the female in long poems which are (of course) the genre in which Dahlen acts. What is the [female] model here (since heroism and polis are used up)? It's perhaps 1001 nights, in which a story unfolds in an endless webbing of connections, done so that the woman-teller can escape—or defer—death.

* * *

A Poetics by Charles Bernstein (Harvard University Press, 1992) has a cover that puns on Zukofsky's "A"—as did Dahlen's first "reading," and evokes all the complex tolerance of "a" not "the." One of the half-title pages, however, calls the book "apoetics"; like the term "amoral," the prefix indicates "without, not, neutral to, or in opposition to"—a skeptic's poetics. Bernstein is insistently transgressive of binary thinking; he will trouble it with skepticism and with attention to situational nuance. This is a book of wonderful, teasing, and directed intelligence. It is a book, also, that uses, to gain cultural tread, Bernstein's ability to focus and synthesize important contributions and analysis from others—from Jerome McGann, James Clifford, Robert Casillo, Sanford Gilman, Peter Quartermain. The first message I received from some of the essays (the one called "Professing Stein. . ." and "Time out of Motion") was the degree to which Bernstein acts in a principled fashion to challenge certain contemporary findings of literary history. (This is the Groucho Marx—quizzical eyebrows— or William Carlos Williams—pert judgment—aspect of things. He teases that his is a poetics of the 3 Marxes and the 4 Williamses.) It is here that one finds a thorough consideration of Island English (of England) and the multiple non-insular "eccentric" poetries in English, of Paul Dunbar's dialect poetry, of the relation of Pound to fascism, of the question of a modernism "gutted" by New Criticism, of Stein as inhabiting her own time—not "postmodern," but rather us as still Georgian (Antimodernist or Countermodernist). Contained also are some pages of extreme interest on the impact of the Second World War and the Holocaust on the poetries (of the New and "Newer" American poets, and of Reznikoff and Rothenberg in our country) which first refuse the grand authoritarian schemes of modernism and then pierce "the atmosphere of willed forgetting of the 1950s" (216). The second message is a Bakhtinian one (or maybe the Karl Marxist poetics of Raymond Williams): that utterance is inside of history and ideology. Or "poetry not as transcendent but as colored: *of* the world." (162). This is a topic of great importance in part because most of the contemporary theory holding this position does not (repeat, not) apply itself to poetry, but sticks with fiction and other discourses. Bernstein, for example, names as "shifters" the keywords of poetics (e.g. tradition, craft, beauty, form, realism), borrowing Benveniste on pronouns, to indicate the fact that they are historically and situationally constructed. (157) Here he calls for, and calls forth, a poetry of dissent, of critique. The third message involves passages or riffs (really better than both Chico Marx and Esther Williams could ever propose) in which Bernstein performs a water ballet, or blows off on, his own sound, his own poetics, or offers conceptual moments crystallizing his kind of practice: "a more destabilising field of

pathos, the ludicrous, schtick, sarcasm; a multidimensional textual field that is congenitally unable to maintain an evenness of surface tension or a flatness of affect, where linguistic shards of histrionic inappropriateness pierce the momentary calm of an obscure twist of phrase. . . ." (220) Here is the long meditative essay in poetry called "Artifice of Absorption," which is a reading of language poetries under the certain critical rubrics (rhetoricity, hyperattentiveness, absorption) priming for "a poem that can / absorb its readers in something other than static— / call it ecstatic, or utopia, or say / it is the unnameable that writing constantly / names. To do this requires something strange & jolting. . . ." This "apoetics" offers a thoroughly admirable and elegant jolt.

* * *

For about a year, I have been struggling with Tom Mendel's *Realism* (Burning Deck Press, 1991—a riveting cover by Norma Cole). It's strange—this book both attracts and baffles me. It seemed worth recording the bemusement—the prose works ("The Shade" or "Jews in Hell" or "Realism") are especially distinctive, filled with a shadow play of strain about the oblique relation of language and reality, also with sardonic idioms in shadowy personae: "People say a verb involves action: let them talk" (44) These works seem often to have purgatorial themes, people caught at the crossing points of terrific vectors of time and space, not sure of their responsibilities ("From minds gingerly emerge terms of fate, facts and sentences singly." 60), whether they matter, or whether they are getting it either: "So much is certain, and so much more is not. If you do not wish to join me, to look through the keyhole again and again, place your equipment in a build-up of words. In this way will we destroy what we have labored in vain to extinguish by more direct means—our memories." (19) The cool grief-stricken implacability of this is distinctive. Seeing, trying to say, just being there "one falters, sorry, one alters" (61); Mandel's play with this deliberate slip says one can barely face the world of things, much less the world of language in which to try to respond or record. Language itself is a purgatorial experience: "a letter is a darkness. . ." (64), place where hopes are tempered, and where penance is done.

* * *

A short hand-printed book from Gil Ott (*Wheel,* Chax Press, 1992) meditates writing practices in an interesting split screen of short poem and prose passage each themselves fragmentary and discontinuous, before the work breaks into something closer to a manifesto:

with dignity the sentence
coupled in ways
to retain clarity characteristic
of a seed,

yet a lot of people seem to be scapegoated, and self-divided (as the very strong woodcuts, also by Ott, tell). So the poem seems to hover between adequacy with the politics of the poetic act and bafflement with it: "Simple simple. I came to question // history exclude the vanquished, each false // mountain or tree, or species // manufactured item. . ." is a statement seemingly modified by the last words: "how to speak / knocked out of me // furrows, which, after rain, lost // lay down in."

* * *

Another poet whose work is presented with his own images is Piotr Sommer, with a first book in English (from Polish) called *Things to Translate and Other Poems* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1991); it is self-translated, with a long and distinguished list of helpers. The book selects of mainly lyric work from 1980–89 and some haunting photographs of the corners of old woodland houses, seen from the outside, looming, with innocent but amazing traces of human presence (comforters airing out a window, or a child in a stroller pushed by another child). Sommer has a connoisseur's eye for the uncanny in the ordinary. Things need to be translated because they are so ordinary we cannot register them, yet they gleam with aura. We don't see the aura until these strange feelings are "translated"—into poems. So one reads the allegorical starkness of "'What's going on now?' /. . .It was a question to the world. // For a long time I said nothing, / but now the world / spoke through me." What the world says in every instance—intimate, particular, minor (about walking, buying cigarettes, washing dishes, meditating family life) also comes to seem monumental without losing the small, tender distinctiveness of what people are and what they bear. The effect and the scale are somewhat like Reznikoff or Oppen. Translation as a metaphor is manifest as well because value is seen just at the moment of passage elsewhere—sometimes into death, sometimes from event to memory, but always from one word to another, in the choice between words in some human (humane) space, in which it is the purpose of these works to "reside," or, rather, translated more simply, to "live."

* * *

Another book that, like Bernstein's needs to be in everyone's library is Allen Grossman's *The Sighted Singer: Two Works on Poetry for Readers and*

Writers (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). This is a two part "anatomy." The first consists of a "fully collaborative" set of mutual conversations at ten year intervals between mentor (Grossman) and ephebe or youth (Mark Halliday, an APR-type poet). It is a pedagogic dialogue of a Socratic kind with a real inequality between the discussants; it is offered as an example of (in Grossman's excellent term) a "hermeneutic friendship" of caring interchange, of helping the other to meaning (369). Part of the frustration with both poets, but especially Grossman (who has more at stake) is the heavily canonical—romantic canonical—range of his poetic interests. It is the same kind of point that Marjorie Perloff made about a recent anthology called *Lyric Poetry: Beyond the New Criticism* in an essay in *Poetic License*. A catalogue of the poets discussed reveals a great de-emphasis on modernism of the "aperture" (Grossman's terms). He stops with Whitman. I am astonished he doesn't even get to Robert Duncan—odic, romantic, altogether his kind of poetry. It may be pert of me, but I'd love to offer Grossman a serious reading list in contemporary writing, not large but pointed. It would include all of George Oppen, some Charles Reznikoff, some Jackson Mac Low, Robert Creeley, some Frank O'Hara, Michael Palmer (a poet whose very Frenchness and link to Stevens might be the first to engage him), the above-mentioned Beverly Dahlen, Jerome Rothenberg's "Khurbn." (I'm not trying to leave you all off the list—I'm trying to be pedagogic and directed.) Maybe Grossman has tried, and hates it all so much he is too polite to mention his disgust, but I can hardly believe he hears APR-contemporary as poetry of the depth and seriousness that otherwise engages him. And some more knowledge would save the book from a contrast of closed and open forms which states that the possibility of a poetry of "flowing with" the world is perhaps "unactual." (332) This doesn't know enough about the poetics of metonymy, nor of its interest in going beyond "natural privilege" of link with the cosmos, into the issue of language. This is a lack that hardly disqualifies the book, which is rich and brilliant in ways I will try to outline, but it creates a stain of suspicion of some of its stances.

The second part of the book is the real heart of the matter: a noble work called "Summa Lyrica: A Primer of the Commonplaces in Speculative Poetics." Numbered philosophic meditations, fully fledged argument, some gnomic aphorisms, some odic prose poems, many scholia all speaking from the center of culture, and all presented as trans-historical absolutes (i.e. commonplaces), as if "poetry" were one seamless enterprise, from earliest times to our own. It's not an opinion I hold about poetry, but it is one a person might yearn to credit. Because the voice and the arguments are vatic, encompassing, observant, and categorical, this section, like a rising tide, carries all ships. The range of reference is impressive, and the topics covered enrich any reader: prosodies vertical

and horizontal, closed and open form, silence and language, poet and Beloved, mother and father, the nature of poetic language—finite and infinite, cultural stances like muse, bridegroom, guest, the bond of the poem and death, Judaic radical humanism and Hellenic aesthetic humanism.

One of the main subtexts for me involved gender, because lyric poetry makes many assumptions about femaleness, the role of the Beloved and the muse. There were many places at which I had questions about the assumption of universality, or questions about the way a female poet might negotiate the poetic tradition as Grossman presents it. For example, if the poetic speaker is "the archetypal senex puer" (221), where is the female? Who functions as the Beloved for the female poet? If "the speaker of a poem is in the presence of the fathers" (258), how may a woman poet negotiate that place? If "the speaker in the poem is the man who has usurped the right of the first night in which he was conceived," where does the woman poet belong? (278) The materials on mother and father as positions in language are fascinating, but always "the child is the person as speaker who goes through his growth." (359) Is "his" as a pronoun really meant to incorporate "her"? These are not meant to be carping questions from a limited or marginalized place, but rather questions that pierce the heart of Grossman's claim of universalism. If the theory does not account for female (i.e. socially changing) positions in language, or see that there could be historical differences and specific conditions in the access of women (and others) to poetic speech, a big hole is put in the claim of trans-historical commonplaces. Women, and others (e.g. non-hegemonic races) whose access to literary writing has normally been socially mediated or hurdle-laden (see Woolf's metaphor in *A Room of One's Own),* may learn all this "common knowledge" about poetry, but may learn it socially, not existentially, not as a condition of being invested with the poetic spirit (as Grossman seems to claim). This book is worth both argument and admiration. It is not only essentialist, and frustrating; it is essential, and pleasure-giving.

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

The second edition of MILTON KESSLER'S *The Grand Concourse* will appear in 1993; *Riding First Car* will be available in a very limited edition with graphics in 1993. WILL ALEXANDER is currently reading Michel Leiris, Martin Bernal, and Ivan Van Sertime; he is also drawing and working on new compositions in pastel. Having completed his *Trilce* translation, now available through Marsilio, NYC, CLAYTON ESHLEMAN is working on "Under World Arrest," to be published by Black Sparrow in 1993. MELVIN EDWARDS shows at CDS Gallery in NYC; in 1993 he will have a retrospective exhibition at SUNY-Purchase. JAYNE CORTEZ is the author of eight books and has also produced five recordings of poetry. Her most recent book is *Poetic Magnetic;* her latest recording, *Everywhere Drums.* JORGE SANTIAGO PEREDNIK's most recent book of poetry is *El Fin del No* (Buenos Aires: Editorial El Caldero, 1991). MOLLY WEIGEL is working on an anthology in translation of the Argentine group *XUL.* ANDREW SCHELLING is on the faculty of the Naropa Institute. His translation of the medieval Hindi poet Mirabai is forthcoming. His *Dropping the Bow,* translations from classical Sanskrit poetry, won the Academy of American Poets award in translation. ELIOT WEINBERGER'S *Outside Stories* has just been published by New Directions. PAUL VIOLI's next book is *The Curious Builder,* Hanging Loose Press, fall 1992. DAN FEATHERSTON, who works at The Shaman Drum Bookstore in Ann Arbor, is currently traveling in Mexico. JAMES IRBY teaches Latin American Literature at Princeton University. Other Lezama Lima translations by him have appeared in *Sulfurs* 3, 24 and 25. BARBARA GUEST's *The Altos,* in collaboration with artist Richard Tattle, has recently been published by Limestone Press. Her *Defensive Rapture,* the title poem of which appeared in *Sulfur,* will be published by Sun & Moon. HERBERT LUST has authored various art history books on Giacometti and Surrealist artists, and a novel, *Violence & Defiance.* MICHAEL GIZZI'S most recent books are *Continental Harmony* (see the Taffy Martin review in this issue) and *Vers d'Aigrefin* (Les Cahiers de Royaumont). HUGH SEIDMAN's latest book, *People Live, They Have Lives,* will be published this fall by the Miami University Press (Oxford, Ohio). ED SANDERS' next collection of poetry, *Hymn to the Rebel Cafe,* will

be published by Black Sparrow in 1993. His musical drama, *Cassandra,* in Greek and English, based on texts by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Homer, had its premiere performance at River Arts in Woodstock, summer 1992. JACKSON MAC LOW and his wife, Anne Tardos, taught in Vienna in April 1992 at the Schule für Dichtung in Vien, a new writing school. His last book was *Twenties: 100 poems* (Roof, 1991). His long-awaited *Pieces o' Six: 33 poems in prose* will appear soon from Sun & Moon. JOHN TAGGART has completed a series of meditations on the reading process and the work of Edward Hopper which will be published under the title *Remaining in Light: Ant Meditations on a Painting by Edward Hopper* by the SUNY Press next year. His *Songs of Degrees: Essays on Contemporary Poetry & Poetics* will also be published next year by the University of Alabama Press. ROBERT C. MORGAN is an artist, critic, poet, curator, and art historian who lives and works in NYC. He has written for *Tema Celeste, Art News, Lapiz,* and other journals. He is currently preparing two books on the history of criticism of conceptual art and an anthology of contemporary art criticism. KARIN LESSING has lived for many years in the French Vaucluse. PAUL CHRISTENSEN'S most recent book is *Minding the Underworld: Clayton Eshleman and Late Postmodernism* (Black Sparrow, 1991). MAXINE CHERNOFF is the author of a novel, *Plain Grief,* and a book of short stories, *Bop.* Her most recent book of poems is *Leap Year Day: New & Selected Poetry.* She co-edits *New American Writing.* CONNIE DEANOVICH is editor of *B City* magazine and the recipient of a GE Award for Younger Writers. Her work appears in the anthology *Under 35: The New Generation of American Poets* (Anchor/Doubleday). CARL RAKOSI'S *Collected Poems* were brought out by the National Poetry Foundation in 1986 and his *Collected Prose* in 1983. A volume of critical essays on his work is due later this year in the Man And Poet series of The National Poetry Foundation. SPENCER SELBY'S most recent book is *House of Before,* Potes & Poets, 1991. CLARK COOLIDGE'S latest books are *Odes of Roba* and *The Book of During,* both published by The Figures. JANET KAUFFMAN'S novel *The Body in Four Parts* will be published by Greywolf, spring 1993. JULIA BALLERINI'S essays and reviews have appeared in various magazines such as *Art in America* and in anthologies. She is presently writing a book on nineteenth-century travel photography and is assistant professor in the Department of Art History at the University of Hartford. BEVERLY ALLEN, an associate professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Syracuse University, writes that *"Idioma* is the third in a 'false trilogy,' as Zanzotto puts it, having roughly to do with the conditions of impossibility that accrue to language and our existence within and through it *anyway. Idioma* comes home to the village, and the village is Pieve di Soligo, and that's where the poet has always lived, given his difficulties with leaving that reach pathological proportions (he told me on the phone

yesterday that he can barely even get to Milan any more)." PETER REDGROVE is a poet, novelist, playwright and co-author (with his wife Penelope Shuttle) of *The Wise Wound,* a revolutionary study of the human fertility cycle. He lives in Cornwall. AVERY E.D. BURNS lives in San Francisco and edits the magazine *lyric&.* CAROL MAIER is presently translating Rosa Chacel's novel, *Memoirs of Leticia Valle.* MARJORIE PERLOFF'S most recent book is *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media.* She is currently editing a collection of essays on John Cage. RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS has an article on Lorine Neidecker in *The Kenyon Review. Drafts 3-14* (Potes & Poets) is her most recent book of poetry.

SULFUR 33: INTO THE PAST

One of the great projects of 20th-century poetry has been the recovery, invention and reinvention of the past: the "modern" is a set of songlines through medieval Provence and T'ang China, Mayas and Florentines, the English Metaphysicals or the singers of Gilgamesh. But in recent years the tracks have been vanishing: the presence of the past has seemed to slip out of the present. In the poetry magazines, it's as though the creation of the universe occurred around 1910—before that, the great abyss.

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8. Whatever isn't covered above.

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Final deadline is May 1, 1993. Inquiries, suggestions, proposals, should be sent as soon as possible. All correspondence on this issue: Eliot Weinberger, 202 West 10th Street, New York, NY 10014.

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—George Butterick

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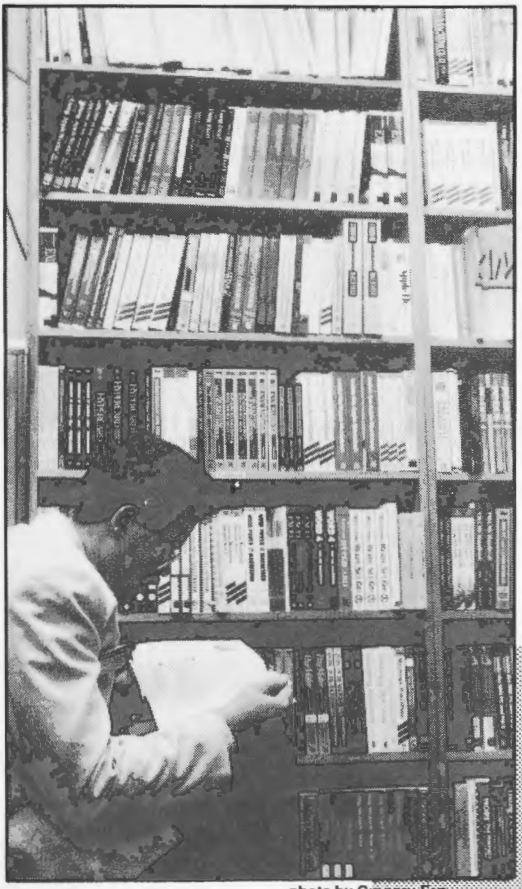

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